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*How they did; or, Those four, by the
author of 'The aggravating school girl'.*

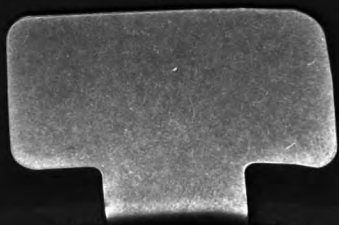
Grace Stebbing

A. Cra...

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"Weel, leddies, will ye, may be, be ganging your ways?"—Page 47.

HOW THEY DID;

OR,

THOSE FOUR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE AGGRAVATING SCHOOL GIRL,"

"SILVERDALE RECTORY," &c.



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MDCCCLXXXIII.

Dedicated
TO
JEANIE,
AND THE
MEMORY OF PLEASANT TIMES.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND AMERICA	1
II. SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE	12
III. SCRAPES AND MISTAKES	32
IV. GROUND-FLOOR LODGINGS	43
V. VICTORY FOR THE INVADERS	47
VI. ARMED WITH A SPIDER	63
VII. AILSA MENZIES'S BELIEF	71
VIII. "WE CAN DO WITHOUT"	82
IX. ON THE TOP OF GOATFELL	93
X. COWS!	100
XI. ONE THING TO FIND A PATH, ANOTHER THING TO FOLLOW IT	108
XII. REGULAR BEGGARS	122
XIII. NOT JAMES AND JACK, NOT DONALD NOR DAVIE	137
XIV. ONE WAY OUT OF A DILEMMA	147
XV. THE REWARD OF TRUST	153
XVI. A READY RECKONER	157

CHAP.	PAGE
XVII. MRS. WILSON TO THE RESCUE	167
XXVIII. ALICE PUTS ON HER APRON	182
XIX. "BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW"	194
XX. "MRS. ROBERTSON" GETS A LETTER	208
XXI. "A TRESS OF GOLDEN HAIR, OF DROWNED MAIDEN'S HAIR"	217
XXII. ALICE TRIES THE HIGHLAND FASHION	231
XXIII. "AND THEY CANNOT SWIM!"	244
XXIV. "LET US PRAY"	259
XXV. HER LONDON HOME	268
XXVI. THAT NIGHT	280
XXVII. "HOW MANY CANDLES TO THE POUND?"	285
XXVIII. ALICE TERRY MEDITATES	301
XXIX. ALICE'S WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS	307
XXX. MISS ALICE TERRY'S TALES	319
XXXI. LAST DAYS IN ARRAN	335
XXXII. IN CONCLUSION	339

HOW THEY DID.

CHAPTER I.

ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND AMERICA.

A PLEASANT little sitting-room in a somewhat out-of-the-way corner of a fine family mansion in the North of England; a lovely afternoon towards the end of July; tea, bread-and-butter, and new strawberry jam on the table; and a party of four girls, ages sixteen, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-three, soft-haired, bright-eyed, and happy-faced as any to be met with in the land of bright-faced girls.

The eldest and youngest of the companions, Flora and Jeanie Campbell, were sisters and orphans, with one only brother at the other side of the world, and no other relative, as far as they were aware, at all. Esmé Wilson, aged nineteen, had been a young schoolfellow of Flora's in bypast days, and had been one of the most ardent of Miss Campbell's many schoolgirl admirers. Alice Terry

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had also been a schoolfellow of Esmé's, coming to the school after Flora had ended her course of study there, and in some measure filling up the blank in Esmé Wilson's heart. Esmé felt almost too happy to contain herself, now that she had contrived, with some difficulty, to find herself associated with both her choicest friends.

Miss Wilson's task had indeed been no light one, and had necessitated a good deal of management and an immense number of letters; for of that party she was the only independent one, and to add, in so-called Irish fashion, even her independence was limited. Flora Campbell was governess in Felmer Hall, her own private little sitting-room in which grand mansion they were then occupying; her sister Jeanie was pupil-teacher in a ladies' school a few miles distant; and Alice Terry, a talented American girl, was governess to a family in Surrey.

Alice had been brought over to England two years ago by her English mother to finish her education. They had been over little more than twelvemonths when the double news came to them of the utter wreck of their fortunes and of the sudden death of Mr. Terry. Mrs. Terry was thankful enough to accept the post offered her, of house-keeper in the boarding-house in which she had been residing in Richmond to be near her daughter, and the head of Alice's school exerted herself to

place the poor fatherless girl well and comfortably, with kind-hearted people not far distant from her surviving parent. For the Campbells, orphans though they had been for the past twelve years, they had been accustomed to all the luxuries of wealth until Flora was in her twenty-first year, when the breaking of a bank robbed the brother and sisters of everything but themselves, each other, their brave spirits, healthy bodies, and deep trust in a Heavenly Father's watchful love, which they all, including young Jeanie, had long since learnt to cherish.

Within three months Flora had entered upon her duties as a governess, she had placed her young sister in a carefully chosen school as pupil-teacher, and their nineteen-year-old brother had set out for Australia. But this was the third summer since those events had come to pass, and any silent regrets that might have lingered in the Campbells' hearts had long since faded; they lived in the present and the future.

"And the present would be much more agreeable if you would just hand over that strawberry jam," said Esmé Wilson, not in answer to us, but in answer to a philosophical remark just pronounced by Alice Terry.

"Hand over! Hand out, you mean," retorted Alice to the young lady, who was balancing herself and her teacup in somewhat titta-ma-torta

fashion on the window-sill. "You look as if you were practising to hang yourself out to dry, after a Scotch mist, on a clothes-line."

The imputation appeared still more just the next moment, when Miss Esmé's head and shoulders disappeared completely outside the window, while her tiptoeing feet just touched the floor inside. The saucer refusing absolutely to do impossibilities in the way of balancing on the narrow window-ledge, it and the cup had been finally deposited on the grassy bank below.

Jeanie broke into a silvery peal of laughter as Esmé's crimson face reappeared. "Do you mean to go through that gymnastic performance every time you wish to drink some of your tea?" she asked.

Esmé's rosy lips went into something of a disconsolate pout. "Why, what else can I do?" was the reply. "I never did see such a horribly inconvenient sill as this. It's so narrow that it won't hold the cup even without the saucer."

"And you could not put it down inside instead of outside, I suppose," said Jeanie demurely.

"Or even, perhaps, come to the table like a sensible being or an ordinary mortal," added Flora, with a suspicion of a laugh creeping through the calmness.

But there was no laugh in the answered—"Thank you indeed! You would be taking me

for one of the little Felmers, and beginning to teach me my"—

"Manners at a penny an hour," interrupted Alice. "But you had better give me that bit of business. You would find me cleverer at it than Flora, I guess. She's just a trifle—well, stiff, you know."

"How dare you?" exclaimed Jeanie with just a trifle of real indignation in her voice, as she sprang up and put her arm around the beloved elder sister's waist.

But golden-haired Jeanie might have spared her indignation, true and assumed, for if there had really been anything of stiffness in graceful Flora Campbell, true and tender-hearted Alice Terry would have been about the last person to proclaim the fact. However, whilst there was one class of facts that nothing would have induced the American girl to declare, there was another class with which her tongue was particularly ready, as pupils, friends, and all companions had long ago found out, and so will those who read about her in a very short time, I venture to predict.

By the by, it is to be hoped that folks will not be very shocked to learn that the young lady's strictures on Esmé were the less pardonable, inasmuch as she was herself proving her freedom from governess restraint by taking her tea enthroned on the back of an armchair. Jeanie's post, until

she sprang up as her sister's partisan, had been a footstool in front of the same armchair, the seat of which had served as table for both. The only one of the party, in fact, who was behaving properly like a grown-up young lady was brown-eyed Flora, the hostess of the tea-table.

The truth of the matter was, it was the first day of the holidays. Sir James and Lady Felmer had left Felmer Hall that morning with their children for a two months' yachting tour. Jeanie had arrived from her school the previous night, and Esmé and Alice had only reached Felmer Hall an hour ago by the morning mail-train from Euston, just in time to get rid of their hats and dust-cloaks when they were summoned downstairs by the welcome announcement of tea.

"And good, kind Lady Felmer says that I am to be sure to keep you all here as my guests for the next week at any rate," said Flora with a beaming face, "and for the whole time they are absent, if you like to stay."

"Which we don't," said Alice Terry, her reply having in it less of real than apparent ungraciousness.

Indeed, Flora herself, the giver of the invitation, at once unhesitatingly echoed, "Which we don't," with a still more beaming countenance than before, and then she installed herself at the tea-table, and looked on with mingled wonder and amusement

whilst her companions took up their various positions, chosen with more view to reminding themselves of their freedom from the ordinary observances of self-discipline, than to generally received ideas of comfort. With chairs drawn round the table the girls would certainly have been better placed for satisfying their sensible appreciation of tea, with the country luxuries of cream, fresh butter just churned, and jam made of fresh-gathered strawberries.

"But then, you see, you dear, solemn old maid," remarked Alice, "we should run a risk of forgetting, now and again, that we were not still sitting at the head of a schoolroom tea-table. At least I should."

"And I," added Esmé, "should forget that I was not still in the drawing-room at home, awaiting the pleasure of her high mightiness, Elinor, to get a cup of tea at all."

Esmé was the younger daughter of well-to-do and very indulgent parents, and possibly life might have flowed along too smoothly with her, had it not been for the existence of a somewhat domineering elder sister, who had so transcendent an opinion of her own merits, that she had a wrathful contempt for any one who ventured to make the discovery that they were, in many respects, inferior to those of others who modestly ranked themselves as very ordinary individuals. It was sorely against

her desire, hinted and urged in every way but a downright open one, that Esmé had obtained leave for this intensely longed-for trip. However, here she was, seated on the window-sill, and getting her breath back after her late efforts to dispose of her cup with due regard to its safety and her own satisfaction.

"Apropos of nothing," said the young lady as the crimson slowly faded from her face, leaving her cheeks of their natural tint of rose and white,—
"apropos of nothing"——

"Nay, of the penny an hour for manners, you mean," amended Alice Terry, "unless you wish to turn from such a painful subject."

"Miss Terry," said the voice from the window-sill, "I ignore your remarks. Consider yourself ignored. Miss Campbell, be good enough henceforth to understand that I address myself to you."

"That's right, my dear Esmé," answered Flora, laughing. "I would have nothing to do with those two, if I were you. They treat you terribly badly. What do you wish to say to me? I'm all ears."

"Like a donkey," came a mutter.

"You Irish thing," came another mutter; "that's got a tail too. Like a pitcher, you mean."

"No, I don't," came the answering retort.
"Pitchers have got long ears, but they aren't all

ears. They've got something to hang the ears on to."

"Which donkeys haven't, I suppose, you two—two—gooses!" broke in Esmé aloud. "And now, you provoking things, you've made me forget all about my 'apropos of nothing' affair. But meantime, Flora, do you intend to allow two of your guests to monopolise that jam to the utter detriment of the third?"

"Mine goodness!" ejaculated Alice Terry. "Quick, Jeanie, hand it up here. If she calls that an 'apropos of nothing,' what will she call an *apropos* of something? Flora, don't let yourself be talked over by her, pray. She's had two great spoonfuls before; I've seen her; and by tilting the jar ever so little you can actually see the bottom already, and I want ever so much more."

At that moment there was a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of a neat, comely, good-tempered-looking dame. Her cheerful voice was as pleasant as her face as she said, with a slight accent of kindly apology, "I only came, Miss Campbell, to see whether the servants had given you everything you wish for."

"Oh, yes. Thank you, Mrs. Stewart, for your kindness," said Flora, with the sweet, grateful smile that most people found it a happy thing to win. But Miss Esmé started forward. She had been to

Felmer Hall before, and made acquaintance with its housekeeper.

"Mrs. Stewart!"

"Yes, then, my bonny Miss Esmé," came the smiling answer; "what does that doleful little pout mean, I wonder? Won't they allow you a chair at the table like a civilized being, my poor, ill-used young lady?"

"It's they won't allow me any civilized jam, Mrs. Stewart, that is"——

"That is what the pout means," Esmé was intending to say; but when a lady is surrounded by four people all indulging themselves in fits of laughter, saying anything is a matter of some difficulty. However, quite enough had been said to touch Mrs. Stewart's hospitable instincts. Laughing she left the room, and still laughing she returned to it, and not empty-handed.

"There, my bonny Missie," she said cheerily as she placed a particularly fine specimen of a pound-cake on the table. "If you are being stinted of civilized jam, you shall at least have a piece of civilized cake. I made that myself on purpose for Miss Campbell's tea-table this evening, and I don't know where my memory was when I forgot to give it out to the maid."

Jeanie sprang from her footstool again, but Alice was down from her perch even sooner, and with

outspread hands stood guard over the new dainty, as she said calmly, "Ah! ma'am, you don't know how truly good your memory has been to store itself and that cake up till now. If it had been brought forward sooner, I should have had either to put down the jam-jar, or to endure the mortification of seeing that greedy little opossum there beginning on the cake before me."

CHAPTER II.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE.

STILL the same room and the same company, but the table has been cleared of cups and saucers, an empty jam-jar, and some tolerable remnants of pound-cake. In place of tea-things the crewel-worked holland cover is now spread with a couple of open atlases, a note-book and pencil, and a guidebook.

The note-book and pencil and the guide-book are Flora Campbell's property, as any one might guess; the two atlases have been fetched by Esmé Wilson from the Felmer schoolroom. One of them is open at a map of the world, the other is open at a map of Scotland.

Flora is seated in her former place at the head of the small oval table, with the note-book and pencil before her. Her three younger companions, with a general interlacing of arms which might fairly well be considered torture if compulsory, are hanging together over the maps.

"Oh, how jolly! How awfully, deliciously, delightfully, fearfully jolly!" breathed Alice Terry

at last, still gazing at one of the maps, and after a profound silence had reigned in the room for at least thirty seconds.

Jeanie leant across her to say in a stage-whisper to Esmé, "Esmé, Alice told me in a letter, a few weeks ago, that she was writing an essay on the mischievous tendency of the present day to use strong language about trifles."

Esmé nodded her dainty small head. "Ah! she told that piece of news to me too. She proves what a strong effect her arguments are likely to have upon people."

"My fingers shall have a strong effect upon your two arms, Impudences, I guess, if you don't take care how you rouse my fierce wrath and indignation," was the retort, as Miss Alice shook herself free of her companions, and, suiting her actions to her words, bestowed the threatened pinches, at the same time adding, "But, seriously, don't you all feel inclined to jump out of your skins for joy at the prospect of the next four or five weeks? I know I do."

"And I know I don't," said English Esmé. "Packing is worry enough, I'm sure, as it is. I don't want to have to squeeze anything more into my portmanteau, I can tell you, not even my skin. I only wish that I could turn all my clothes, and my brushes and combs, and everything else, into skin for the next month or so."

Golden-haired Jeanie's silvery laugh rang out again. "Ah! Flora, listen to her. Would not any one think, to hear her speak, that she would be content with a garment of sackcloth, and a rope round her waist to tie it in? Little they would dream of a cloth dress of royal purple, costing over six guineas, to climb Scotch mountains in, and ford tumbling tarns!"

Flora looked up from her note-book smiling. "If you don't all sit down, and let us have a sensible discussion of plans for a little while, it seems to me that neither we nor royal-hued dresses have much chance of indulging in these delights."

Startled "Oh's!" from three throats, and a rapid untwining of arms to pull chairs forward and occupy them, as though it really were believed that a good deal might depend upon the promptitude with which that part of the advice was obeyed.

"But now, Flora, what do you mean?" asked Alice Terry, while the two fair-haired ones dropped their round white chins into their joined palms and looked puzzled.

Flora Campbell looked rather puzzled herself as she replied, "What do I mean? I must retort by saying, What do you mean, Alice, by your question?"

"Here we go round the mulberry bush!" interjected that irreverent Jeanie. "Do please oblige me, Alice, by saying to Flora, 'And what do you mean by your What do you mean?' We shall"——

"Just what I mean to do," interrupted Alice.

"That's right," nodded golden-head contentedly. "We shall get to the end of the matter at that rate by bedtime, perhaps."

"If you are impudent, small child, the chances are that that time will come for you at once," muttered golden-head number two.

"A good suggestion," said Alice, glancing round at the pair for a moment, and then looking back to Flora to say, "Really, do you know, Flora, I think you had better send those two children off to bed. We shall never get a chance of any reasonable conversation while they are here."

The interlude that followed this speech need not be described further than to say that Flora was not altogether sorry that, in less than five minutes, her boisterous companions overflowed into the garden, Esmé setting the example of springing over the window-sill, for which she had shown such a partiality earlier in the evening.

Having made the tour of the gardens, found some late-ripening strawberries, "*and* some slugs!" as Esmé Wilson added with a shudder, the girls re-entered Miss Campbell's little sitting-room through the same opening by which they had quitted it, and once more, in a somewhat breathless condition, Alice Terry demanded—

"And now again, most grave and reverend Doc-

tor Flora, the philosopher, and philosophic emblem of calmness, dignity, and common sense "——

"There was a sentence in the newspaper the other day about a 'long-winded orator,'" muttered somebody.

"Is that one of your 'apropos of nothings'?" muttered another somebody.

"Just so," was the reply.

"Never mind them, Alice dear," said Flora, soothingly.

Truth to say she was rather anxious to stop another impending outbreak of the game of "Catch who catch can." Lady Felmer had most earnestly adjured her highly esteemed young governess to remember that the coming days were to be days of joyous holiday, and that she was not to trammel herself or her friends with the chains of discipline needful and proper for term-time.

"You will all be of more healthy usefulness to your young pupils," the mother had said, most wisely, "for remembering, during these next few weeks, that you also are young, with still undried springs in you of joyous fun and merriment."

Bright enough by natural disposition, Flora, as the eldest of three beggared orphans, had had much to make her grave, and far older-seeming than her years. Those who valued her most highly rather dreaded for her a growing tendency to look only on the sober side of life, and it was to aid in correcting

this that Sir William and Lady Felmer had done everything in their power to second Esmé Wilson's scheme for these present holidays. But, if Flora Campbell had dared to venture upon a full confession, even to her own heart, she must have acknowledged to feeling just a trifle frightened at finding herself at the head of this light-hearted, high-spirited crew; and, at any rate, there was a medium in all things, even for young Jeanie. The elder sister considered that one childlike game of romps was certainly enough for the present, and so she hastily brought the calming influence of her voice to bear, just in time to prevent a second.

"They are nothing but a couple of babies, Alice dear; I would not mind them, if I were you."

"Mind them, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Alice in a proper tone of scorn; "I should just think not." And, to Flora's satisfaction, she sat down again to prove the truth of her assertion, and then added, "And so, as I was saying, O thou second Daniel! may I venture to inquire, after this long interval, what do you mean by your 'What do you mean'?"

"She's forgotten," came a mutter.

"Quite forgotten," came the echo.

Flora, even self-controlled Flora, broke into a peal of laughter. "They are quite right, Alice; I have not even the ghost of a remembrance what any of the 'what do you means' referred to."

"Then all I can say is," was the retort, "what do

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69

you mean by having such a bad memory? With which parting remark we'll decently smother over that bygone subject and start afresh with questions built upon a new principle."

"Americanism number one," came the mutter.

"No, number two; she said 'guess' before," came the answer.

"How I do wish that I were a boy for once!" groaned Alice.

"For once?" asked Jeanie eagerly. She was perpetually feeling hardly done by in belonging to the weaker sex. "Why do you wish that you were a boy, especially just now, Alice?"

"Because then I could say 'Shut up.' It is the only expression in the English language that seems at this moment in any way to fit in with my feelings of aggravation against you two."

"Then I'll say it for you," said that pink of propriety, Flora. "Do shut up those boxes, your mouths, you two, just for a little while, for really we ought to be coming to some sort of a decision as to what we mean to do and where we mean to go."

Flora Campbell had scarcely uttered that final word of her speech when the whole three of her companions started up as though they were puppets pulled by one string—a clockwork affair, perhaps, the spring of which was set free by the word "go."

"Why, Flora, whatever can you be talking about?" exclaimed three voices just touched with

a shade of alarm, and Jeanie gazed at her sister as if she feared that she must have been taken suddenly ill and become delirious.

"Where we mean to go is a matter that has been settled ever so long since," said Alice Terry.

"I should think so, indeed," assented Esmé Wilson, adding in one breath, "To the land of Scott and heather and Burns and waterfalls and Chalmers and lochs and fells."

"And the Bruce and too many cows and Wallace and wet mists," added Alice in the same grandiloquent tone and comma-less style of sentence. She would have continued, but that Jeanie clapped her hand over her mouth with the imperative command—

"Hold your tongue this moment, ma'am, and don't dare to entertain so much as the shadowyest smile ever invented, in connection with your thoughts of Scotland, the bravest, bonniest, grandest land of all the world."

"Grand, indeed!" ejaculated Miss Terry, tossing up her head, and setting her mouth free by the action. "As grand as one of your Skye terriers beside a Newfoundland. Poor little half of a poor little island! Since I came to live on this little scrap of the earth's surface, I have never ceased to be thankful that I am a girl and not a boy. In the latter case I should have been in everlasting terror lest an unthinking manly stride should convey me over the edge into the ocean. I cannot

imagine how it is that any of you poor things ever feel safe out of the Midland Counties."

"Under those circumstances," said Flora, laughing, "your vote goes, of course, for keeping well away from all the firths. At last I am getting a useful hint from somebody; for, small as Scotland may be, it nevertheless contains more than one hotel, or one set of lodgings for the night, so now perhaps you may all begin to perceive that, after all, some further plan of operations is necessary besides the preliminary decision that we mean to go to Scotland."

Miss Campbell's sedate and judicial manner of pronouncing those last sentences had the effect, at length, of producing some answering degree of calmness in her companions.

"But can we not get into Scotland first," asked Esmé Wilson, "and then, when we are actually in the midst of its purple heather, arrange what parts of it we intend to visit?"

"Oh, you unpractical girl!" said Flora, laughing. "How are we to get into the midst of the heather without going there, and how are we to go there without some mode of conveyance, even if it be only our own feet? At present the only thing that your letters, or any one's letters, has settled is, that we are to go to Scotland these holidays. Now, in the first place, I should like it to be decided *when* we are to go."

"To-mor—" began one voice. "The day after to-morrow," said Alice Terry firmly; and the other voice, joined by the hitherto silent one, made a correction to the same decision.

Flora put a mark against an entry in her note-book, and moving her pencil down paused a moment, and then looked up with the query, "Is our tour to be chiefly devoted to the North of Scotland, to the Lowlands, or the Western Highlands?"

"Where you like," said Alice. "Any part; I expect it's all beautiful," was Esmé's equally indefinite answer. So Jeanie's eager, modest, "Oh, if it only might be the Western Highlands!" was allowed to settle that matter.

"Then we come to question number three," said Flora, once more making a mark in her note-book, once more letting her pencil travel downwards. "As you two, Esmé and Alice, have never seen Edinburgh, our beautiful Scotch Athens, you really ought to do more than just rush through it; so shall we spend two or three days there at the outset of our trip or on our return?"

"Oh, on our return," exclaimed the London damsel, in a tone of such prompt resolve that all her companions looked at her in surprise at the phenomenon.

"Whatever private reason have you, pray, for your very pronounced wish on this point?" asked Alice with curiosity. It was soon satisfied.

"No private reason at all," said Esmé, bravely; "but you know quite well that I never did care for the 'Heart of Midlothian' as much as for most of the others."

For a moment Alice Terry opened her dark eyes very wide, and repeated slowly—"The others!" She would have repeated the words in her questioning tone again, but that she was interrupted by one of Jeanie's very merriest peals of laughter.

"Oh, Flora, do you know I really think we ought to change our plans even now, at the last moment. I really do believe that we ought not to take poor Esmé to Scotland."

"Why not, Jeanie?" asked her sister with a smile.

"Why, because she will be the unfortunate victim of such bitter disappointment," came the answer from those laughing lips. "Don't you see, she is going to Scotland to make friends with the White Lady of Avenel, and Bonnie Prince Charlie, and Rob Roy, and Dominie Sampson, and Dirk Hatteraick, and all the other delightful ladies and gentlemen of the 'Waverley Novels.' And when we don't even introduce her to Roderic Dhu, she will cry her poor eyes out, and look upon us as two base impostors."

"How is she to look upon you when her eyes are wept away, Sandy my dear?" whispered Alice across Esmé.

"Don't tease the poor little thing, Alice," said Miss Wilson with an air of sweetly sublime pity. "The Irish and Scotch have the same ancestors, and both peoples are prone to be irascible when they are put out. They are best let alone, poor things." For which recommendation to forbearance the young lady found herself, the next moment, seated on the floor.

"You see, my dearly beloved friend," said mischievous Jeanie, "it is hardly safe for the smallest and weakest of a party to arouse the just ire of her companions."

"Ire, indeed!" retorted the conquered but unsubdued occupant of the floor. "Flora, do you not discourage the use by little children of words that they can neither spell nor understand?"

"If you don't take care," was the reply, between fun and earnest, "I shall tell you all that I don't approve of grown-up ladies acting like babies. Now, we have a very serious matter indeed to take into consideration before the supper comes in, so just draw up your chairs, all of you, and put on your 'sensible caps' "——

"Haven't got one—couldn't afford the luxury—too dear," came an interruption from that incorrigible Alice. "Can hardly afford needful articles—must go without superfluities."

"Very sad for your friends," sighed Flora. "But if you have been so unfortunate as to leave common-

sense out of your purchases, please be so good as to 'make believe' a little, just for the next ten minutes, while we all turn out our travelling purses for general inspection, and each count out the same sum apiece to put into the common purse, and then when that begins to grow empty, it shall be my care to give the warning, and to direct our route homewards. There is my contribution, and that is Jeanie's. Our brother Donald sent Jeanie's to her a few weeks ago on purpose for this holiday, and I have spent nothing on pleasure for three years past, so we have a right to this."

"And I have at least an equal right, for my long-continued course of exemplary good conduct," put in Miss Alice, as she laid a bank-note and some sovereigns on the table.

"You maypole of vanity!" ejaculated a smothered voice.

"Not at all," came the calm reply. "Those were the very words in my estimable great-aunt's letter which accompanied this gift. I only prove their justice by placing such implicit faith in the opinion of my elders and betters."

"A superabundant faith in others is not one of your chief faults generally," said Esmé, as she ran round the table with her contribution to the general travelling expenses, and placed the packet of money in Flora's hand, while she put her disengaged arm around her friend's neck, laid her face caressingly

against her cheek, and whispered something in her ear.

Miss Campbell's face flushed, and there was a momentary pained hesitation visible in her manner. Then she replied gently, but firmly as gently, and aloud—"No, no, Esmé dear; it must not be. Your parents are most good and generous—too generous. You are very, very kind, but it must not be. We must use our own money for our own holiday, and when that is spent we must be well satisfied to return home."

Esmé Wilson withdrew her arm from her old schoolfellow's neck, and turned hastily away to hide the tears which had rushed into her eyes, as she exclaimed with angry sorrow, "Ah! that is just what papa said. He said I should find there was too much Scotch pride in you to let me have this pleasure."

Flora stretched out her hand and drew the vexed and disappointed girl back, and pulling her down into a chair beside her, said affectionately, "I don't know about my refusal coming from Scotch pride, Goldie, dear; I think it arises from proper pride—or self-respect, I would rather call it. As you have all been acting like children the past three or four hours I will treat you like children, and tell you a story I read a little while ago in 'Clarke's Commentary to the Bible.' Sir William has it in the library here."

"All right, my dear; never mind the preface,"

said that self-asserting Miss Alice, coming in with her speech once more, as she folded her arms on the table and leant forward in a listening attitude, "I'll do introduction for you. Once upon a time. Now, go on!"

The young lady thus adjured shook her head at the self-constituted director of proceedings, but obeyed nevertheless.

"Well, if you are willing to be quiet and listen, you shall hear my tale. Once upon a time, before the days of Mahomet, there was an Arabian nobleman, by name Hatim Taï. The name of this man, noble by nature as by birth, became famous throughout the East for his large-hearted generosity. It came to pass, during the height of his popularity, that he made a great feast. With the gigantic ideas of those semi-barbaric days, he slew a hundred camels as provision for his entertainment, and invited every one far and near, from the grandest of his brethren amongst the Arabian nobility, down to the poorest peasant of the surrounding district, to partake of his good cheer"——

"I am awfully glad he didn't ask me to partake of camel—ugh!"

"Miss Terry, if you interrupt you shall be sent to bed without any supper," came a suppressed growl from a pair of small crimson lips. "Aye," added Flora, "and yet worse, with an unsatisfied, starving curiosity as to the end of my

anecdote. But to continue. In Hatim Tai's benevolent anxiety that every one around him should have a share of his good things, about the time that they were ready to be served he took a walk out to a neighbouring wood, to see if he could yet find any stranger or wanderer to whom to extend an earnest welcome to his hospitable home."

"And camel-meat—ugh!"

"Yes, and camel-meat. If you don't take care, Alice, you shall get nothing but porridge without milk in our hospitable land. But I shall never get to the end of my tale. Well, walking along the skirts of the wood, with his eyes keen to perceive any fellow human being who might be in his vicinity, he at length espied an old man coming out from between the trees, worn with age and poverty, and bending beneath the burden of a faggot of sticks. Our good-hearted, charitable nobleman at once went up to him, and asked him why he was not making holiday that afternoon. 'Do you not know,' he said, 'that Hatim Tai makes a feast to-day for every one who will partake of it, and that you will be made as welcome there as any one?' 'Yes,' said the old man quietly, and still bending patiently beneath his humble load. 'Yes, I know all that, I thank you, sir. You tell me no news.' 'Then,' exclaimed Hatim Tai, in astonishment, "why are you still labouring here, and not rather hastening with the crowd to his tents,

that you also may be able to rejoice at his well-covered tables?' Once more the aged man raised his eyes to his questioner—eyes dim with age but deep with earnestness. 'My friend,' he answered, 'he that is able to gain his bread, even by collecting faggots in the wood, should not be beholden even to Hatim Tai!'

"Clarke adds to his anecdote that this is a noble saying, and I say so too."

For a few moments there was silence in that little sitting-room. At last Esmé asked quietly, "But, Flora, there is one thing I cannot understand. Apropos of what could that anecdote come into a commentary on the Bible, do you know?"

"Oh, yes," came the ready answer, with a slight smile. "It occurs in the notes on the eleventh and twelfth verses of the fourth chapter of the first Epistle to the Thessalonians."

Jeanie took down a Bible from the hanging bookshelf on the wall behind her, and opening it at the chapter named, read half aloud—"That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."

"Yes, dear, that is the passage," said Flora gently; "and Mr. Clarke says on it that he who is able to get his own bread should not be under obligation even to a king."

"But," said Esmé, still very unwilling to yield the point especially under consideration, "according to you and your Mr. Commentator, I, then, have no more right to use any of this money than you, for I have done no work to earn it from papa."

Flora Campbell pressed her arm more closely around her friend as she replied affectionately, "Perhaps your father and I disagree with you on that point, Goldie. Affectionate, ever-ready home ministry as worthily earns reward as our work for strangers. You might as well doubt whether a hard-worked mother of a family deserved her board and lodging and money for her clothes as really as a hired housekeeper. But listen—I hear the supper tray coming. Halve your golden treasures; give me the one portion, and put the other by for a rainy day."

"You are very hard," moaned Miss Esmé, as she proceeded to do as she was bid; but before the affair was finally settled she had not only to halve but quarter her store, to bring down her contribution to a level with those of her companions. "It is cruel of you, Flora dear—it is indeed," she said, the loving blue eyes once more filling with tears as she bid her friend good-night. "I had been so looking forward to being able to put a little bit of extra brightness back into your life once more. I have been so counting on it."

"And so you have, dear, dearest Esmé," was the

eager answer. "But for you, and your suggestions and urgings, I should never have dreamt of undertaking this tour; and you do not know what it is to Jeanie and me once more to visit our native land, and with you, our best and dearest friend."

But, all the same, Miss Flora had to make some little concession of independence to friendship before Esmé Wilson, otherwise called Goldie in reference to the burnished gold bands of hair that crowned the little head, could be sent off to her own bedroom in any tolerable state of happiness.

"I am to be allowed to stand treat to you all in the article of bowls of milk as often as I like," she announced triumphantly to Alice Terry; "and if ever the third-class carriages look out-and-out horrible, I am to be let to pay the difference to second for us all. That is at least something I have gained, is it not?"

"Humph!" was the reply; "that remains to be seen, as far as my share in the arrangement is concerned at any rate, my self-congratulating young lady. You two seem to think I'm a bale of cotton goods, to be dealt with according to your good will and pleasure, rather than an independent citizen of the great republic! You've been managing a sort of 'corner,' in fact, between you; but I warn you, Bull and Bear both, so just look out; you'll maybe find that you've sold what you haven't got to somebody who's bought what they won't get. *You'll*

feed me with milk, indeed, you small baby! If you don't take care, I'll just buy a cradle to-morrow, and carry you to Scotland in that."

"And meantime do go to sleep, Yankee dear, please, like a good Hottentot, or any other converted 'heathen Chinees,' for I am tired. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

CHAPTER III.

SCRAPES AND MISTAKES.

"OFF at last!" exclaimed Jeanie, clapping her hands, as the engine-whistle sounded loud and shrill, and the train began to move slowly out of the station at Carlisle.

The good-byes had been said to Felmer Hall for the present, and to Mrs. Stewart, and the party of girls was fairly embarked on the holiday trip to Scotland. At least so Jeanie supposed when she uttered her glad shout, but one in a very different key was heard the next moment, and re-echoed—

"Where's Esmé!"

Where, indeed? They might be embarked for Scotland certainly, but as to the fairness of the start, that was another matter.

"Oh, wherever can she be?" almost sobbed Flora, and all three heads crowded together at the windows on to the platform, just in time to see a small skirmish going on at the door of one of the carriages—some one trying to risk life and limbs, not to mention a forty-shilling fine, by jumping out

while the train was in motion, making frantic efforts to do so, and being resolutely pushed back by a couple of stalwart porters.

"All right, ladies!" shouted one of these same porters, a second or so later, in at the window of the third-class compartment as the train moved past him. "It's all right, ladies; you'll stop at another station in forty-five minutes, and then the young lady can join you."

And so Miss Esmé Wilson did, pouting, and with tear-dimmed eyes.

"But whatever took you out of this carriage into that other is what puzzles me," said Alice Terry, as she helped her friend up the step and then put her down into a seat with an air of resolution, as though to make sure of her now at any rate. "I told you, you small morsel, that you would be getting into scrapes and making mistakes if you did not keep with us."

"But I didn't make any mistakes," was the pouting answer.

"Only got into scrapes in the shape of a wrong carriage!" came the laughing retort. "A small error, but not a mistake!"

"No, because I did it on purpose," said Esmé, a slight smile and a blush beginning to dawn on her discomfited countenance. "I did not know the train was to start so soon, and I just wanted to examine what was the superiority of a second-class carriage

over a third-class one. I have never been in either before since I was a little child."

Alice clasped her hands and heaved a sigh as she murmured compassionately, "Poor little ignorant and benighted denizen of a land of prejudice! I pity you. I can do no more, unless you will accept the solace of a peppermint-scented brandyball. Their appearance and perfume is not wholly tempting, but the seller of them assured me I should find them 'comforting.'"

Miss Terry stood rather in need of something comforting herself next day, when, in her determination that Esmé should not again be lost sight of, she hurried with that young lady on board a boat at the Greenock pier, and only found out as it was steaming off, and Jeanie and Flora stood wildly gesticulating on the somewhat dingy wooden planks of the Greenock landing-place, that she and Esmé Wilson were now bound for the island of Bute, where they had not intended to go, instead of for the island of Arran, for which their tickets were taken.

"You aggravating thing! whatever are you laughing about?" she exclaimed in astonishment, as she turned round with considerable anxiety to see how Esmé was taking this fresh misadventure, and found her face sparkling with merriment. The laughter bubbled over with the reply—

"I'm only thinking how sad it is for sensible people to get into scrapes and make mistakes."



"You aggravating thing! whatever are you laughing about?"—Page 34.

Then, a little more soberly, "But still, Alice, what will really become of us all now, I wonder? This is much worse than my blunder yesterday."

"Infinitely!" solemnly assented Miss Terry. "How do you like the idea of a trip to the whale fisheries? For myself, I am warmly clad, but for you, in this flimsy pink cotton thing, I am afraid it may be trying."

"Like you?" was the query, as Esmé waved her handkerchief for the last time to the vanishing figures of Flora and Jeanie on the pier, and turned to take a look at the scene around her.

The morning was fine, the air was delicious, she had the self-possessed, ever-ready American girl with her, and, in spite of the tiresome separation of the party, Miss Wilson's rosy face felt in no wise inclined to adopt the doleful pouts of yesterday. Alice's good spirits also quite returned when she learnt that the Campbells would be able to join them, by another boat leaving the mainland for Rothesay, in the afternoon.

"And if not," she said resignedly, "we can join them to-morrow at Arran. Meantime—wishing them our own philosophical determination not to waste holiday hours in repinings—Esmé, how very full that bag of yours seems to be stuffed. Won't it burst?"

"I hope not; but it is very crammed, certainly. I bought a lot of buns and pears at that stall on

the pier, and to save having the worry of them in my hands I crammed them in my bag."

"Oh—h, I see! Are the pears nice ones?"

"Perhaps you would like to try?" asked Esmé with a mischievous laugh as she unclasped her bag. "And don't you think you had better learn at the same time if the buns are good?"

"Why, to be sure I do," was the answer. "European breakfasts are really the most wasteful and unsatisfactory things, you know, Esmé. They are like bad dictionaries—want making up with first a supplement and then an appendix. But oh! just look there. Did you ever see such a picture of a poor little pitiful sight?" And Alice took the bun from her lips again, her hungry appetite forgotten in a deeper interest.

At the fore part of the boat, huddled down together on the planks, with a big basket of vegetables and eggs before them, were two children, a boy and girl, clad in garments of that particular condition and appearance that instinctively call up thoughts of pitchforks and a bonfire to cleanly, benevolent-minded housewives. The girl's clothing consisted of a begrimed red and black patched frock, very scant, very short. Beneath it hung in ragged festoons, not graceful ones, the remnants of an old green petticoat. The torn fragment of a Stuart-plaid shawl was tied round the bony little shoulders. The boy had covering of some sort on,

but it was impossible to say what it was. But the one thing that, to Alice's comprehension, it was possible to say was—that the two children's hearts were as worn and weary with life's hard way as it was possible for children's hearts to be. Instinct drew them thus into close companionship. Together they could just bear existence, alone it would have been impossible.

Alice Terry went up to them, stooped over them, dropping the bun into one lap, the pear into the other. The startled faces, that were instantly raised, met one of those rare looks of gentle gravity that some people thought it was utterly improbable should ever be detected in the mischievous-loving, clear grey eyes. It was there now, at any rate.

"Are you all alone, you small, little scraps?" asked Alice. And the better to hear the answer she knelt down and leant her arms on the handle of the basket that stood between them.

The small, little scraps looked at her for a few moments, and then they looked at each other.

"We are together," said the boy.

A pause followed those three words. Esmé Wilson came forward and looked on curiously. Alice looked down at the eggs and other things in the basket. She declared afterwards that she had been watching a caterpillar's enjoyment of cauliflower. It is quite possible, for her sympathies were wide; but it is, nevertheless, quite certain that

the caterpillar only came in for a share of them at that moment by accident. After a long minute had passed she looked up again.

"You two are together—with no one else?" she asked.

The girl answered the question this time.

"Father's dead, and mother's ill, and the new baby, and Dandy died when father did. There's only us to come an' sell the eggs. Mother sent us, Johnny and me—that's all."

And then she stroked the bun with her hand, and whispered more shyly, "Is this for me and Johnny?"

"Johnny shall have another," broke in Esmé quickly, putting one into the boy's hand as she spoke, and a sixpence with it.

And then the two girls took a turn about the deck, while the children ate their cookies, and Alice unconsciously began to hum softly—

"Scatter seeds of kindness."

She broke off abruptly as Esmé turned her face from the beautiful Clyde views to say, in a low tone of unusual earnestness—

"You may well sing that hymn, Alice, for you have got it in your heart as well as in your memory."

"Because a hungry, half-breakfasted creature gives a bun to a wholly unbreakfasted one, do you

mean?" asked Alice with a laugh, and a change back to her most usual outer self. But Esmé shook her head.

"I was not thinking anything about the bun," she replied quietly. "I wish I knew how to turn sad faces into happy ones as you do."

They took another turn up and down the deck. Esmé bestowed a couple more buns upon their new protégés, and then a brilliant idea struck her.

"Alice, should you mind only having a lot of eggs for dinner to-day? I should like it for my part; and then we could buy that basketful of your small little scraps, at any rate, and make them safe so far of their day's money."

"More than the eggs will be in your charge," said Alice, with shining eyes although she could not keep back mischievous words as they came to her lips for utterance.

She followed Esmé's eager feet, and came up in time to save an imminently extensive breakage from three pairs of hands all trying to count at once two dozen and a half eggs.

"Two shillings and sixpence," said the little boy with a thankful sigh.

"Seven and sixpence," said London Esmé quite joyfully, reckoning new-laid eggs at the price she had heard her mother say was paid for them, and thinking of how much the children would have to take home rather than of the somewhat expensive

dinner she was proposing to provide for herself and her companion. She was not half satisfied when Alice split the difference between the two calculations, although the children's faces utterly lost their woebegone expression with the unexpected ease with which they had disposed of the chief part of their merchandise, and at their unexpected riches.

"And now, ma'am," said Alice, after making things even with the brother and sister by bestowing a sixpence out of her purse upon the little girl,—"Now, ma'am, how about cooking your dinner, please? Are you intending to hire the steamer's boiler, may I ask?" The grey eyes twinkled with amusement, but Esmé looked anything but amused. Her new purchase was already very embarrassing, and before she could smooth out the dismal pout of her lips enough to scold Alice for teasing, the steamer stopped at Rothesay. Alice picked up the awkward parcel with a hearty laugh, lent the little boy a hand with the basket of vegetables, with the calmest indifference to what folks about her might think, and so over the plank from the steamer and on to the strand at Rothesay, the final good-bye between the new pairs of acquaintances being sweetened by the bestowal of the remainder of the buns on the children.

"Perhaps mother likes buns," said Esmé; "and at any rate," she added, with a grim little glance at the eggs, "I am sure that we have provisions enough

for the hungriest creatures. Alice, now don't be aggravating; do tell me what we are to do with them. I can't eat raw eggs, and I'm sure we cannot ask hotel people to cook them for us."

"No; we'll ask that good-tempered looking woman in that milkshop instead," answered Alice, marching into the milkshop as she spoke.

It would be hard to say which felt the most astonished a quarter of an hour later, the good-tempered Scotchwoman, who found herself packing up a parcel of half-a-dozen hot hard-boiled eggs and scones spread with "powdered" butter, or the English girl who stood looking on, marvelling how it was that her friend managed to make every one do exactly what she wanted, and, moreover, made them like the doing it.

"And you'll take care of the rest of them and our bags till we call for them, won't you?" said Alice, as she left the shop with Esmé for a climb up the hills behind Rothesay, as a pastime till the others could arrive.

"So much for the first two days of our travels," remarked Jeanie that night in one of the rooms of the temperance hotel, where the four were once more gathered together. "If we go on like this for the rest of the six weeks, we shall have no difficulty at all in finding an appropriate title for our diaries."

"Nay then, I assure you, they will never get

written," rejoined Flora laughing; "for I beg to tell every one this, that the very next time any one of you three gets lost or strays, I shall be lost on my way back to Felmer Hall."

"Then you must start very soon, I am afraid," said the unabashed Alice, "for I am almost certain that I shall be lost again, twenty minutes hence, in the land of Nod."

CHAPTER IV.

GROUND-FLOOR LODGINGS.

“UGH! how horrid!”

“What’s the matter now, you inveterate grumbler?” called a fresh, girlish voice, with a pretty strong emphasis on the *r*’s in her question.

“Grumbler, indeed!” retorted the other. “I can put up with a good deal, but three spiders, two daddylonglegs, and a couple of earwigs, not to speak of wasps, are a little too much for any person’s equanimity in connection with a sleeping-room.”

“That is to say, for a Cockney,” put in a third speaker mischievously, her own accent giving unmistakable proof that she herself had not been brought up within sound of Bow Bells.

At this juncture a tidy, tall, old Scotchwoman, in slippered feet without stockings, appeared in the doorway of the ground-floor, wooden-built apartment, or, to give it a more fitting title, shanty, which a party of young tourists found themselves called upon to share with a rather determined-

looking army of insects, already aided by that nine-tenths of the law comprised in the word "possession."

The grave and dignified individual in the doorway turned her eyes slowly from one dissatisfied face to another of the party of four, and at length calmly but sternly ejaculated, "Ye'll no be likin' the looks o' my ap-par-tment, I reckon, an' maybe I'll no be likin' ower much the looks o' ye; sae ye'll doobtless suit yoursels elsewhere."

"But there is no elsewhere," murmured a tired voice disconsolately, and with another shuddering glance at those earwigs. "I wish there was an elsewhere, but there is not."

"No, there is nowhere else," suddenly exclaimed a quick, eager voice from the other side of the small lodging. "But look, girls, look! There's something ever so nice here. Inside this door there are two dear little rooms, infinitely more delightful than this outer one."

Before the others could answer, the old lady had made three strides across to the side of the bold explorer, and once more took up her position in a doorway, but this time the inner one.

"Ye'll no gang in there, leddies, I tell ye, bonnie or bad though the bit rooms may be. Ye'll jist tak' this'n here or nane. These are to a gentleman, an' he's had them for lang,—as douce a mon as ye'd see in a day's mairch; and I'd no see him put aboot for a parcel o' lassies, I tell ye."

"Parcel of lassies, indeed!" exclaimed the first speaker. "He would not speak of us in that contemptuous tone if he could see us, I'll be bound."

"Any way," laughed the young discoverer, still peering as well as she was able longingly into the cosy little rooms, "if he is really so douce and nice, I'm sure he would rather put up with discomforts than let us do so."

"Of course he would," said Esmé Wilson. "And if he's anything of a man at all, it stands to reason he can't have such a horror of spiders and the general race of crawlies as I have."

"Of course not. In fact, I rather like the idea of being awakened by one crawling over my mouth," answered a deep, clear voice from some unseen corner in the depths of the inner rooms.

And there were four little stifled, startled cries, and four pairs of startled bright eyes stared at each other as the four owners crept quickly together behind the shelter of the broad Scotchwoman.

"Hoot awa!" muttered Ailsa Menzies herself; "wha'd ken that, douce as he may be, he'd be that douce as a body couldna tell he was by?"

But the next minute from that shadowy corner came a laugh as merry, if not quite so ringingly clear, as Miss Jeanie's own, followed by the words, "Nay, then, my friends, I hope that your silence and retreat do not signify that you regard me as something even more to be dreaded and avoided than

earwigs and harvest-mice. I assure you that I am not even a Gorgon's head."

"Luckier for the earwigs than for you, ma'am," murmured that incorrigible Alice, as she pinched London Esmé's arm to give due application to her remark.

However, even her overflowing high spirits were toned down to womanly gentleness as the hitherto heard but unseen owner of the coveted apartments came forward from the more distant of his limited suite of rooms, and took up the position in the doorway which Mrs. Ailsa Menzies vacated at his approach.

A tall, white-haired man, with something of singular, almost womanly sweetness about his mouth, but with a pair of deep-set, keen dark eyes below the noble forehead that most imperatively forbade any suspicion of effeminacy in connection with the owner. As the glances of the timid group of tourists rose to the mouth, they one and all mentally echoed the landlady's dictum—"A douce man;" as the glances ascended to the eyes, to one at least of the party came a memory, echo of words so often heard—"And God made man."

CHAPTER V.

VICTORY FOR THE INVADERS.

"WHEEL, leddies, will ye, maybe, be ganging your ways?" asked Mrs. Ailsa Menzies from her post of guard between the two sets of apartments of her small lodging-house.

The silence had lasted some moments after Alice Terry's last remark anent the Gorgon's head and the earwigs. No one had spoken, no one had moved. The girls were much struck and somewhat awed by the appearance of the stranger, and he appeared to be somewhat struck, though not awed, by them. The landlady was neither struck nor awed by any of them, but she knew it was time her bairns' supper-porridge was cooking, and a "wastry" of time just then did not suit her fancy. Besides, her bairns were boys, and she had no great liking for girls, little or big. She felt a slightly malicious secret delight that the one small shanty-like room, which was all she had to offer, was not attractive to the late arrivals.

Coming to her place at eight o'clock in the even-

ing like a set of amateur burglars, and with no more luggage than a handbag apiece, Ailsa Menzies would have made short work of sending them off, without so much as admittance over her door-stone, but that Flora Campbell had presented her with a scrawled scrap of paper, which was supposed to represent a letter of introduction from a third cousin, once removed on the mother's side, of Ailsa's own. And as this cousin now and again travelled to Glasgow, and fulfilled sundry commissions in that city for his friends and relations on the shopless island, he was not a person to be lightly regarded, or to have his letters of recommendation treated with needless disrespect. But there was a limit to all things, most especially to Ailsa's condescension and patience, the end of which had been thoroughly reached when she detected the woe-begone discontent on the countenance of the "upstart little Southron, a dwiny-faced thing, not worthy to breathe the bonnie braw air o' Scotland."

The unexpected appearance on the scene of the "douce mon," Mr. Robinson, the lodger after her own taste, had for the minute arrested proceedings, but now it was high time to make a riddance of the feckless lassies, and to close up her doors for the night. With a view to these results she spoke, and getting no immediate answer to her first question, she continued more peremptorily—

"Will ye no be saying your 'good even' here,

I say, leddies? I doubt ye'd better, if ye havena already elected to do wi'oot speeders an' the like indoors, by sleeping wi' them on the highway instead."

"And that is what we really shall have to do, I fear, Mrs. Menzies, if you turn us out," said Flora, gravely; "for we were told at the post-office that this room of yours was the only one to let this evening in the whole village."

"And indeed I can walk no farther," burst from the pale-faced Esmé, with a scarcely suppressed sob as the possibility began to appear imminent that she really might be called upon to make the attempt. She was so thoroughly tired out. She had dropped into a rocking-chair for a few moments' rest, but she got up again now, and went forward to the Scotch-woman wearily, and with a very pleading face.

"Do please let us stop," she begged; "my feet do ache so, and I will try not to look any more as if I minded the earwigs or the spiders."

"There need be nane for ye to mind," was the quick reply, as Dame Ailsa strode across the room, and with foot and hand made short work with the poor insects. The tired young girl's petitioning blue eyes were perhaps even more to thank than the petitioning words for the relenting expression on Mrs. Menzies' massive-featured visage. The face of the English lassie might be a "dwiny" one just then, but it was a very pretty one nevertheless, and

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perhaps, after all, the pathos of weariness may have even added to its natural winningness when the landlady was compelled to take a full look at it upturned pleadingly to her own stern eyes.

The poor insects "improved off the face of the earth," as Alice Terry quoted in a whisper, the owner of the apartment they had so lucklessly invaded stood rolling up her hands in her apron, and looking rather foolish. She already felt quite convinced that she should not succeed in keeping her heart hard against the human invaders, and yet she considered that she was proving herself a most weakly yielding individual in letting them stay. She muttered at last—

"And if I do give in to let ye bide, where, I'd be fain to ask, would ye be thinkin' to put all yoursels to sleep the night? Ye're nane o' ye giants, I'll allow, but the twa o' ye are lang enough; and, forby that, there's not room for the four o' ye here, that's true and certain."

"Then, ma'am, I reckon that we must just contrive to make room," said a brisk, delighted voice, whose owner knew well enough the signs of yielding in a fellow-creature, from a tamed baby to a barn-door fowl.

And forthwith Alice pounced upon a white cloth her sharp eyes had caught sight of, folded up like a small round pillar of white marble on the farther side of a table against the wall. Holding the cloth

in one hand, she drew forward the table with the other, and in another moment had it spread with its snowy covering.

"There!" she exclaimed very contentedly; "that makes the place look brighter and more homelike directly."

And so it did. Another moment, and Alice had pulled off her hat and hung it up on a peg, then she turned with a smile to their landlady—

"Now, please, will you let us have a teapot, and my friend there, your own very best of all country-women, will put some tea in it in less than a couple of hurries, for we are all on the verge of starvation with hunger and thirst."

Esmé had succeeded in arousing commiseration, but Alice Terry succeeded in actually calling up a smile on the rugged face.

"Well, of all the bairns I ever saw!" came the astonished ejaculation. "It's ye that are the couple of hurries, I'm thinking. Are ye always like this?"

"Not when I'm asleep," came the answer, while the speaker was employed in hanging up the hats of Esmé and Flora, and neatly disposing of the bags; "and, besides, you'll see I'll be as still as a mouse for the next half hour if you will only be so good as to supply me with plenty of bread-and-butter and some eggs. I like mine soft, please—two; the others like theirs pretty stiff—five between them. And now, first for the teapot!"

And so saying Miss Alice planted herself in the middle of the room, and stood still with down-dropped hands, in plain token that she really was waiting for that teapot.

Ejaculating "Well, well! well, well! the lass should ha' been a boy—the lass should ha' been a boy," Ailsa Menzies took her departure to fetch the desired teapot from those outer domains occupied by herself and her family during the summer season, when money could be so surely made by letting every tolerable, and, as London-bred Esmé considered, even intolerable sleeping-place, to the ceaseless stream of tourists from all parts of the English-speaking world.

Meantime, long as we may have been in relating the above events, not above three minutes had in reality elapsed since Mr. Robinson came forward to the doorway with the expression of a hope that he was not taken for a Gorgon's head. As Ailsa Menzies went to fetch the teapot the stranger advanced another step or two into the room, the smile on his singularly benevolent-looking face even brighter than before. This time he spoke to Miss Terry—

"How I wish, young lady, that it were possible to enlist you as one of a band of young missionaries. Your ready hands and ready spirit to make the best of things would be so useful."

The girl's bright eyes were full of an expression of grateful deference as she raised them to the speaker's face.

"To be one of a band of backwoodsmen or a shipwrecked islander I think would suit me best, sir. But my friend there with the provision bag is quite prepared, I believe, for the missionary post, if you have one to offer."

Flora's gentle face flushed with shy confusion at being thus pointed out to general attention, and after one swift glance at her, Mr. Robinson drew back towards his own domains, saying pleasantly—

"And meantime I expect the post she will prefer to fill will be that of presiding genius at your tea-table, so that for the present I will wish you farewell and good appetites."

"Oh!" muttered mischievous Jeanie, with the ghost of a groan, intended for Esmé's benefit only. But the stranger was gifted with quick hearing, and he turned round again to amend his last words with a laughing—

"Nay then, missie, I beg your pardon. I should rather wish you, instead of good appetites, food enough to satisfy them. And pray, if the contents of your bags or of Mrs. Menzies' larder fall short, let me know, that I may come to your aid. I always take care to come to this island provided with some provision of private stores. It is not lodgings only that are apt to fall short of visitors' needs."

And so saying, with another smiling bow, the gentleman finally retired, and closed the door

behind him. Jeanie indulged in a little significant shrug of her shoulders, not daring again to vent her thoughts in speech, but Esmé, tired, and rather cross—tired Esmé was less reticent. She certainly did wait until the door of communication between the apartments was shut, and until the sound of the retreating steps on the other side had died away, but then she exclaimed, in not exactly an amiable voice it must be confessed, and with an impatient jerk of the head—

“Alice, do you remember the ‘Patriarch’ in ‘Little Dorrit’? The horrid old wretch who squeezed high rents out of the tenants while he pretended to weep over their miseries.”

“Oh, of course! Who could forget him?” was the reply as Miss Terry opened a packet of loaf-sugar just handed out of the bag, and with her eyes counted the lumps as she answered, “Pancks’s employer, you mean, old white-haired Mr. Casby. But what of him?”

“Why,” with a dolorous little growl, “that I believe he’s in one of those nice cosy little rooms in there—that’s all.”

Flora and Alice started, and came from the table to where Esmé was once more seated in the rocking-chair. “Whatever do you mean?” they asked simultaneously. “Dickens cannot have drawn that mean character from a real living man. And besides, have you seen any one in there?”

"I have seen some one come out of there," replied the young lady coolly, as she went on with the tap, tapping of her tired little foot on the floor in measured beat with the rockers. She rather enjoyed the indignant glances shot at her by one pair of bright eyes, and the pained expression in the others. Jeanie did not content herself with eye-language in which to vent her reproaches.

"My dearly beloved Esmé," she began, between fun and earnest, "I am resolved to petition Flora against letting you get over-tired in the future. The usual sweetness and gracious amiability of your disposition suffer too great a strain. All the assembled company, with the exception of yourself, think you '*douce mon*' one of the most delightful individuals they have ever seen."

"No doubt," was the retort. "So thought the poor deluded dwellers in Labour-in-Vain Court, or whatever the place was called, about the patriarch in the broad-brimmed hat, when he sailed benignly through the yard on Saturdays. He could make fine speeches, and all the while make Pancks grind them into misery. Your most delightful individual can make fine speeches about being able to put up with things, and coming to our aid, and all the rest of it, and all the while he keeps to his own lovely rooms, and leaves us to this spider place; and there's a big one running up the wall just behind you this

very moment, Alice. It will be getting on to you, if you don't take care."

"Then let it," was the offhand answer. But Esmé put out her hand and pulled her companion farther from the live bogey, as she entreated—

"Oh, no, don't! pray don't! If you let it get on to you, very likely next time you come near here it will get on to me."

"Four little ladybirds going for a spree,
A spider gobbled Esmé up, and then there were three."

The teacups appeared as Miss Terry finished this version of a famous and popular poem, and forthwith the thoughts of the improvisatore and of her subject were diverted to other matters, for the teacups were not brought in alone. They were only items on a large, well-filled tray, which Ailsa Menzies deposited at one end of the white-covered table with a certain air of good-natured triumph.

"There, leddies," she said, with a short laugh, "if so be as ye are sae sair set wi' hunger as ye say, ye'd best fa' tae on the bread at ance, and I'll be by with the teapot lang ere ye've swallowed a piece. Come awa, little leddy!"

And with her last words she strode up to Miss Esmé Wilson, stooped over her, and lifting both rocking-chair and its occupant with her great, strong hands, she deposited her burden beside the table that was being spread by a couple of pairs of nimble

hands with a far more comfortable and appetising meal than the party of tourists had dared to hope for.

"Whatever could have given our landlady the thought and good sense to bring us in this potted meat and pressed beef?" ejaculated Jeanie in a tone of hungry content.

"Aye indeed, and the jam," added Esmé. "What a delightful contrast she is to the Patriarch! He makes fine speeches and does nothing, she makes horrid speeches and"——

"Provides us with a number of dainties for which no doubt she will make us pay pretty heavily," interrupted prudent Flora. But in spite of her prudent speech she proceeded, without further loss of time, to follow the example already set her by her companions, and helped herself to some beef.

They had started on their long tramp that morning without their usual provision of bread and biscuits or oatcake. Their proposed route, they had been told, would take them about mid-day past a certain farmhouse where they would be certain of a hospitable reception. Unfortunately, although they surely enough came to the farmhouse, and with due civility made their application to take a noontide rest and meal at the beautifully placed abode, the only permission accorded them was one that could not be denied.

"If ye want to rest, ye can rest ye on the heather yonder; and if ye want a drink, ye can drink o' the burn yonder; there's ne'er ane will say ye nay," was the blunt answer they got from a thick-headed farm labourer who had been left, with a couple of dogs, in charge of the premises whilst its owners were away for a day's jaunt. Thus it came to pass that a day's fast had been added to a day's fatigue, and the usual bloom on the cheeks of Flora Campbell and Esmé Wilson had suffered in consequence.

"How is it that you two look so much less done up than we are, I wonder?" sighed Esmé languidly, pausing after her first slowly-eaten mouthful of bread and meat to regard the vigorous way in which Alice and Jeanie were beginning their welcome meal. Alice looked up from her plate with a half pitying laugh—

"Your wonder need be short lived, you poor little fog-fed Cockney. If you and Flora ate a good-sized American breakfast, as we do, instead of pecking away at a quarter of a sprat or an inch of toast, like a couple of sparrows, you also would be able to exist in tolerable comfort on two big meals a day. But, hurrah! here comes the tea. Mrs. Menzies, if I were a noble specimen of boyhood instead of only a poor thing of a girl, I would call you a brick. Eggs too and fried ham! Glorious! He must have got a heap of hungry

children of his own, I expect, or he never would have catered for us so cleverly."

"What are you talking about, Alice?" queried Esmé, curiously. "Who has got a lot of children and been catering for us?"

"Only that dreadful old humbug of a Patriarch, my dear, I believe, and I hope you like his pressed beef," was the calm answer, added to the next moment by Mrs. Menzies, who looked at least as puzzled as Esme had done when she remarked with some return of displeasure—

"Wha may be your humbug and your Patriarch, young leddy, I ken not. But I'd have ye to know that it's the sma meal ye'd ha' gotten here the nicht if it hadna been for the gudeness, and the thought for a wheen feckless lassies, of yon douce mon, Mr. Robinson. Forby bread and eggs I'd nought else to bring ye, not even butter. And if he's been out once, he's been out half-a-dozen times to me, to see that ye should have all, an' mair than all, that ye could wish for, no to speak o' blowing up the fire under the kettle wi's own newspaper."

"And there wasn't no welwet coach, and no weal cutlets, Joe," murmured a voice as Mrs. Menzies once more left the shanty tea-room and its inhabitants to themselves.

"And there wasn't no old Patriarch, and no dreadful humbug," murmured another voice in a penitent tone; "and, like Topsy, specs I's sorry."

"That there wasn't one, do you mean, Esmé? Pray explain!"

"Miss Jean Campbell, I hadn't the mixing of your brains; if I had, I might have mixed them clever; as it is, least said soonest mended. Flora dear, from my youngest childhood upwards I have never liked sour tea; please give another lump of sugar to a poor creature. I don't mind much if you make a mistake, and drop in two while you are about it."

"And while he is about it, I hope that the very *douce mon* in the next room will make enough noise," murmured Jeanie, her words falling away into a musical laugh, that, as usual, proved catching; and Alice could hardly find voice to utter a smothered ejaculation of—"Healthful dumb-bell practice—remarkably good for the nerves," when the nerves of the whole party of girls, including her own stout ones, were startled by an extra edition of the commotion in the next room. Bang—crash—dash—came something against the door; it burst open; in tumbled a great piece of furniture of some sort, and head over heels rolled a human being of some sort right up to Miss Campbell's feet.

The furniture stopped in its unexpected onslaught upon the tea-party as a block in the doorway; the human being was stopped of necessity in its unlooked-for course by Flora's feet. Lucky for the

human being's head that the feet it rolled up against were not Esmé's, for they would certainly have kicked in a spasm of fright. As it was, after a certain amount of grunting and a certain amount of rubbing, the head slowly picked itself up, and still more slowly, and rather as though in momentary fear of tumbling to pieces, the body belonging to the head followed, and proved to be a tolerably big one, and something more than tolerably clumsy. Miss Terry pushed back her cup and plate, laid her arms on the table, and gazed at the apparition with demonstrative admiration.

"Sandy, my good boy," she began with calm gravity, "your hair is really not so many shades removed from the true Titian colour, and in its present picturesque disorder it is fine. I should like to make a sketch of you—an allegorical sketch, you know, as 'Young Scotland.' Will you permit?"

"Ach!" came a stentorian cry of indignation at this moment, with a harshness only to be attained by German or Scotch throats. "Ach! ye lubberly lout ye, James! Come a-nigh me, lad, an' I'll clout yer ears for ye—as my name's Ailsa, I will. Is that the way ye set up the bed for the young leddies? Glad I am ye've had no porridge to your supper yet the nicht, for it's nane ye'll get."

Miss Alice sprang up from the table, and with her laughing eyes raised to those of the angry mother on the other side of the overturned bed-

stead, asked demurely, "Please, I do so like the look of James; may I give him some bread and jam to make up for his fright and bruises, poor fellow?"

The woman looked at the petitioner for a few moments in silence, and then, as she felt her lips beginning to curve upwards in spite of herself, she stooped over her prostrate furniture, muttering, "There then, girl bairns and boy bairns, it's a' ane! Girl bairns are saucy, an' boy bairns are just loots o' clumsiness."

"To be sure they are, Mrs. Menzies," exclaimed a bright, cheerful voice. "You had better have accepted my help when I first offered it, you see."

It was given now without being offered, and in ten minutes the "douce mon's" pleasant little sitting-room was turned into an equally pleasant bedroom for tired Esmé and Flora.

CHAPTER VI.

ARMED WITH A SPIDER.

"Down with the sparrow, up with the lark," exclaimed a clear, bright voice, about six o'clock in the morning of the day following that on which Mr. Robinson had resigned half of his suite of apartments in favour of an invading army of young ladies.

The voice came from the shanty, through the open door between the two rooms. A second voice equally bright took up the burden—

"And hunt for the earwigs that drop in the dark."

"Then please do it by yourselves," came the retort, "and let sensible people have their sleep out—do!"

"Their sleep out indeed!" exclaimed that ringing, sweet voice of Jeanie's again. "Why, you have had time to have half-a-dozen sleeps out, whatever you may mean by the expression, Ma'am Cockney. You went to bed at nine o'clock, and now it is half-past six, nine hours and a half."

"And I resolved last night to make it eleven

hours," came the determined reply, "and I mean to keep to my resolve. How many spiders and daddylonglegs have you two had crawling over you during the night?"

"Not knowing, can't say," said Miss Alice Terry, coming with one bound from the end of the bed through the door. "But there's a prime one now crawling up your curtains—just see!" Turning the curtain round as she spoke, and displaying to her friend, and within less than two feet of her eyes, a really very fine specimen of the class *Arachnida*.

"Is he not a handsome fellow?" she added calmly. "I brought him in to show you."

"Then it's horrid of you," half-shrieked nervous Esmé as the spider was brought yet another inch or two nearer to her nose, and with a bound almost as vigorous as Alice's she sprang over Flora, and across to the other side of the room,

"Jeanie, Jeanie! she's out of bed! she's out of bed!" cried Alice Terry in triumph, and picking up that useful spider again gently between her finger and thumb, she danced back to her own apartment, just as Flora Campbell tossed back the bedclothes over the foot of the bed and rose also.

Esmé looked at her reproachfully, and with a very pouting pair of red lips. "O Flora! you promised me last night that you would stay in bed till eight o'clock this morning."

"Not quite promised," was the answer, with a quiet smile. "I said I should not mind. But what would be the good of staying in bed with those two wide-awake wild Indians in the next room?"

"Armed with a spider," amended one of the wild Indians.

"Ugh!" shuddered Esmé. "I tell you what it is, young people, you may chance to find the door locked to-night between your wigwam and the abode of civilisation."

"All right!" was the reply. "Forewarned is forearmed, you know. We'll lay in a provision of worms and slugs during the course of the day. They can wriggle and slither themselves through the smallest crevice and under the best-closed door."

"Hush! hush!" now came Miss Campbell's gentle voice. "If you are not a little more choice in your suggestions, you will not be able to repeat your last night's reproaches to-day as to Esmé's breakfast; for instead of eating little I should say, from her present expression of face, she will eat none."

"Then I'll carry out a jar of cold porridge," said the incorrigible Alice, "for her to fall back upon, as she calls it, during the morning."

"Take care that the jar or a well-soaked sponge does not fall back upon your own head," came the

retort from the young lady herself. "Don't you remember that I have often told you my temper is not a safe thing to trifle with, for at least two hours after I have had the grief of parting with my pillow?"

"Then it's a pity that you did not have mine last night," exclaimed Alice once more. "You might have, and welcome, for I parted with it ten minutes after I first laid my head on it."

"I should think you did indeed," came an answering ejaculation. "I remember now I got a heavy thump on the side of the head with it as you threw it away. What were you doing with it? Where has it gone?"

"I am sure I don't know," was the sedate answer. "Gone glimmering away with the moonbeams perhaps. Any way, it was of far too singular and unique a nature to be burdened with the weight of my insignificant head. It reminded me of Shakespeare's foolish king who went to bed in his crown, and then moralized upon its discomfort."

"What *are* you talking about?" asked Esmé, coming forward to the doorway. "What was the matter with your pillow?"

"Nothing, but that it appears to have been made by an ingenious carpenter instead of by an upholsterer. As far as I could judge by feeling it in the dark, it consists of thin slices of wood fastened together with leather thread and rather loosely

stuffed with dried peas—altogether, as I remarked before, too strange and sumptuous an affair for republican simplicity. I make it over, for the remainder of our sojourn here, to the representative of a nation that still boasts of crowns, kings, and other curiosities of antiquity.”

“Take care, Yankee,” whispered her usual ally, Jeanie, with an accompanying pinch; “take care what you say, poor twig of an upstart tree; we are three to one, you know.”

“Never mind,” was the retort, “so long as the one is allowed to eat as much breakfast as most of the three put together. Aren’t you hungry? I am!”

And the question reminding all the party that the fresh morning air had proved very strengthening to their appetites, further conversation was postponed for the present, and the business of the toilette proceeded considerably more quickly in consequence. Had any one seen the four sweet, earnest faces, some twenty minutes later, bent with such grave reverence over their Bibles, the spectator might have been pardoned a degree of doubt if told that the owners of those faces were capable of an amount of youthful fun, exertion, and harmless mischief that might put many an indolent dawdling lad to shame.

We say that the spectator might have been pardoned for doubting the truth of such a statement, but only on this account, that it is one of the miserable mistakes so generally made, that the

buoyancy and briskness proper to youth, health, and good spirits are unladylike qualities—qualities to be repressed as utterly inconsistent with all propriety of behaviour. People are so trained into this notion, that a joyous-hearted girl, who honestly shows the gay gladness of her sunny life, gets called by them, in reproach, a “tomboy,” although she be no more capable of a rude, rough, unwomanly action than those who style her so. Rude, coarse boisterousness is bad, utterly bad ;—bad, disgracefully bad, in the children who come tearing out of some of the Board schools more like young savages than like young girls decently brought up in a civilised and Christian land ; bad in the poor, half-taught, sorely neglected factory girls, who shock and deeply wound all those who have hearts to feel or minds to think, as they come romping and shouting out of the factories ; bad in schoolrooms, classrooms, and in private houses, exhibited in impudent speeches and practical jokes. But merry, generous-hearted fun among girls and young women themselves, the natural outcome of a grateful joy in life, is as utterly good as the other is bad ; and if it were more encouraged, instead of repressed, there would be fewer recruits, after school-days are over, for the do-nothing race than there are at present. If girls of eighteen were no more ashamed of being caught jumping from the top of a stile, or with a skipping-rope in their hands, than they are of being found

lolling listlessly on a sofa, their active energy would seek work instead of shunning it, and their braced-up, wide-awake minds would abhor moral cowardice and meannesses of all kinds as much as did the Campbells, Esmé Wilson, and Alice Terry. The "not at home" falsehood was a woman's invention, I believe, and it is a long-drawn-out slur upon woman's dignity, upon woman's nobility of character, that it still exists.

The first woman who said "not at home" when she was, had a particularly strong dread of cows, I expect. She went to spend a few weeks in the country, where she dared not go out because of the cows, poor, weak, limp-minded creature, and so she lay on a sofa and read novels, and when a friend called to see her, she was in the middle of a love-scene between Adolphus Augustus and Evelina Thyatira, and very untidy besides; and so, with a sudden effort of mean wit, she told the staring, bewildered country bumpkin servant, who had learnt in the Sunday-school that liars cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven, that she was "not at home." A brave, grand beginning truly, and her sisters through the succeeding generations accept the paltry invention of their slatternly, cowardly predecessor.

There! that is a fancy sketch, as you understand; but this much is certain, if the inventor of "not at home" was not afraid of cows, she was afraid of

truth, and that is an infinitely meaner bit of cowardice. And so, to dismiss her once more from our pages to the fields of fancy, or wherever else she came from, and to return to the island of Arran, and its one particular shanty in which we are more especially interested.

CHAPTER VII.

AILS A MENZIES'S BELIEF.

"AND now for the order of the day," said Jeanie Campbell as she pushed wide open the window of the shanty, while Alice Terry and Esmé proceeded to make the bed, and Flora's neat, sensible hands deftly aided in transforming the bedroom into a breakfast parlour.

Esmé stooped to pick up Alice's rejected pillow. She did it with rather gingerly fingers; there was no saying how many earwigs and beetles might not have found harbourage underneath it, or perhaps even one of Alice's favourite, quick-moving spiders. But her thoughts moved, just that moment, more quickly than her hands, and having put the pillow in its place, she said seriously—

"Do you know, Flora, really it seems to me that the first thing to be done, even almost before we have breakfast, is to go out in search of other lodgings, so that we may be able to give that kind Mr. Robinson back his room. I would rather put up with earwigs than keep him out of it."

Flora put her arm around her friend a moment and kissed her, while Alice whispered mischievously across the bed, "Bravo! my dear, you are not so bad as you look, after all. You shall not have that feast of cold porridge I promised you, yet awhile. But still, much as I admire your sentiments, I do think, with the august Valoroso, king of Paffagonia, that the rule of life should be, 'Business first and pleasure after;' and so, breakfast say I as soon as we can have it, and then the hunt for apartments with or without six-legged tenants."

And so saying the young lady came from behind the bed, pushed it, with one vigorous push such as James Menzies might have given, back against the wall, and then threw wide the outer door, somewhat to the discomfiture of a hen and her brood of chickens pecking just outside. But in poured the fresh heather-scented air and the bright sunshine, and the whole four maidens stood together for some moments, grouped about the entrance in a state of rapt enjoyment too great for words. Their hearts were dancing like the glancing waters of the little bay.

"Good-day to ye, leddies," shouted Ailsa Menzies to them across her yard, and in a strong accent of approval at finding them so early risen. "Will ye be for having tea or parritch the morn', leddies? The kettle's boilin' brawly, and so's the parritch," with a glance behind her as she spoke, to make sure

that the son told off to stir it was not letting it take care of itself and get burnt. The next minute Miss Terry had run over to her landlady's quarters with a bright smile of silent request, had taken the porridge-stick from the shy lad's fingers, and was stirring away with a will. Mrs. Menzies followed, and stood regarding her with a grim laugh.

"An' how many times will it be that ye ha' made porridge before, I wonder?" she asked at last, as in her turn she took the long stick out of the pot, and poured the contents into a number of bowls placed ready on a board beside the fire; "ye'll no be havin' porridge in fine-lady Lunnon, I think?"

Alice laughed and picked up one of the basons.

"I guess, ma'am, that I don't know much more about fine-lady London ways than you do. I'm an American; but there's a fine-lady Londoner over there just dying to taste the first porridge I've ever stirred; so please let me take this over to her, and then, if we may have the teapot"——

"Bless the bairn!" interrupted the Scotchwoman, with another of those grim short laughs of hers, "if she doesna' say 'have the teapot' as though she'd been born wi' the words in her mouth. I'd be reckonin' mysel', that if ye had e'er a doll when ye were a wee ane, it must ha' been a teapot."

As Dame Ailsa uttered that novel belief, a ringing ripple of laughter greeted her ears, and never before, assuredly, had any sally of her wit been so honoured

as it was now. Not only did Alice, Flora, and Esmé echo Jeanie's musical outburst, but her four laddies, and even her fisherman-goodman himself, were startled to find themselves joining in that summer morning melody. While the party of tourists were at breakfast, twenty minutes later, they all suddenly and simultaneously went off into another peal of laugh upon laugh, like so many little cascades leaping and flashing over the stones and over the moss down to the burn, delighting in their liberty. Into the midst of the laughter came Mrs. Menzies.

"Hech then, young leddies, an' what then is it the noo?" she asked, looking from one to the other of the rosy faces. "What new thoct ha' ye fand to laugh at noo?"

"No new—new thought," stammered Alice through her laughing; "it's—it's only my teapot dolly, ma'am."

"Do tell me please, Mrs. Menzies, what sort of dolly you think I had when I was a little girl," said Esmé Wilson, raising her blue eyes to the rugged face, which instantly softened when it met the pleading, merry gaze, as it had done last night on meeting the pleading, pitiful one from the same pair of eyes.

The Scotchwoman went round the table to where the girl sat, and passed her hand over the curly golden head with an outward show of tenderness

very rare with her, and with the independent air of equality of a true-born Arranite, who feels, if it is not exactly said, "We, and the rest of the world."

A native of little, beautiful Arran will give you help for friendship's sake or for goodwill's sake; for servility's sake—never;—will yield deference to superior strength, superior wit, superior learning or skill, even to superior beauty. But don't go to Arran if you wish to be bowed down to for superior rank, or superior wealth, with no personal attributes to back them up; for should you do so, I warn you in time, you will come away sorely crestfallen and disappointed.

Mrs. Menzies laid her hand on Esmé Wilson's lovely head with the same quiet confidence with which she would have laid it on the head of some neighbour's child, to whom it came to her to show especial favour; and there was something in the independent, dignified bearing of the woman that prevented Esmé feeling the smallest inclination to resent the act as a liberty. Instead of doing so, she asked again in softer tones—

"Well then, what was the doll like, please?"

"An' 'weel then,' is it?" repeated Ailsa with an unusual tremor in her voice. "An' weel, then, it's my thinkin' as there can ha' been sma' need for purchased dollies at a' in your hame, for ye must aye ha' been the dolly there yoursel', an' the play-thing and the pet. An' as it has been, so, to my

belief, 'twill be to the end, my bonnie wee bairn. An' may the Lord be pleased to make ye as gracious in His eyes as ye are in the sin-blind eyes o' your fellow-creatures."

With those last earnest words she withdrew her hand from the soft bright hair, and left the friends to finish their breakfast without farther interruption, having quite forgotten, in her rapidly growing interest in her novel party of lodgers, what she had really come to speak to them about.

There was a silence of some minutes after the landlady had taken her departure. Esmé's silence came from a rather contradictory medley of reasons—modesty at putting herself forward after the compliment just bestowed upon her; a sorrowful confession in her pettish little heart of how very far she must be from being gracious or fair in God's omniscient eyes; and, gradually crowding out all else, a pettish rehearsal to herself of all the many wrongs and annoyances she had all her life had to suffer from, instead of being the indulged darling that this strange Scotch-woman supposed her. She hated troubles, vexations, and disappointments of any kind, and had certainly not yet learned to take them patiently, but she still more hated to be supposed exempt from them. By degrees, as she meditated over the injustice she considered had been done to her, the blushing smile faded into frowns and a pout, and Jeanie leant across the table to half whisper in a tone of mock

condolence, "Poor petted dolly! And what is the matter with it now? Is there another spider in sight?"

"No! Much worse things than spiders, gnats, and wasps," was the reply, so sharply that her companions were startled. At sight of their faces Esmé recovered herself with a laugh, as she exclaimed, "You foolish things! you all look as if you thought I meant that *you* were gnats and wasps."

"Well," said Alice, "you certainly did throw out the accusation, you must allow, with a vigorous knock-me-downness. I certainly did believe, for a moment, that your clockwork machinery had been wound up to the very last twist of wrath by the supposed misdeeds of present company."

"How could you?" ejaculated Esmé reproachfully. "You knew perfectly well, or ought to have done so, who I really was thinking of when I spoke."

The expression of intelligence that now dawned on the countenances of Alice and Jeanie sufficiently proved that their second guess was a more probable one than the first. The great effort made by Flora to have no expression at all on her face was quite as significant to Esmé that she also understood her reference, and she addressed herself to her rather than to the others when she continued, in her former tone of displeasure—

"It's no good, Flora, your being shocked, or pretending to be shocked, for you have seen more than enough to know, as well as I do myself, that I have had all my life to put up with one person horrid enough to darken out most of what might, perhaps, have been sufficiently happy otherwise. A pet indeed! Fine good in being a pet, even if I were willing to acknowledge that I had been one, with Elinor ever at hand to twist everything that I say or do, or that is done or said to me, into crookedness. She pulled little sore places all over me when I was a child, and she has been employed in rubbing cayenne into them ever since."

Flora gazed more fixedly at the teapot than before, looking grieved, but Alice tried to give the matter a lighter tone by saying quietly—

"Ah! well, Esmé, in spite of everything I still feel inclined to think that you are better off with a sister than I am without one. And then, besides, one cannot help admiring Elinor, for she is so very clever in many ways."

"Yes," came the cool retort, "I grant that. Wonderfully clever; especially clever where I am concerned. She performs her operations so tenderly, that people think she is kissing me, and regard me as a brute because I kick. But come, we won't talk about such disagreeable affairs any more now. It seems like a desecration of this exquisite morning to do so. Alice and Jeanie, my dearly beloved

friends, *if* you think that you have eaten about enough breakfast, I really should advise getting out into the sunshine."

"Away from your darling pillow so early as this?" asked Jeanie.

"Aye, indeed. Of what use to remain in its neighbourhood when that only serves to remind me of the barbarity with which it and I were made to part company so soon? But there! I really do mean that I think we had better make the most of this fine weather, and I am sure Flora agrees with me."

"Or would make herself do so now if she had not before, Queen Esmé," said Alice laughing. "But if you will begin to dress at once, I shall have plenty of time to eat another slice of bread and jam before I need follow your example. *I* have not about forty small buttons to do up on *my* boots."

"Thirty on the two, to be quite correct," said Jeanie, holding up the dainty footgear as she spoke.

"If you don't take care I'll cut all the buttons off, and tie my boots on with a bit of string," threatened Esmé, springing up to regain her property, which the next moment was taken from astonished Jeanie's hand and transferred to the owner's.

"There, my bairn," said laughing Ailsa Menzies. "When they teaze ye, because ye are the sma' ane amang them, ye come awa to Ailsa. She'll see to your richts for ye."

"Thank you for the promise," was the laughing answer, "and thank you for coming in to my aid now."

"Nay then, that's a thank too much," corrected the Scotchwoman. "It wasna to gie ye aid that I came in the noo, but to tell my errand to the leddy yonder, which ye put oot o' my head a while since wi' your talk about dollies."

Flora came forward from the inner room rather anxiously. "A message for me, did you say?" she asked quickly.

Mrs. Menzies replied as quickly, "Aye, but nought to whiten your cheeks, young leddy. It is only from the douce mon, Mr. Robinson. He hopes that ye all slept comfortably the night, and, moreover, that ye will be able to make yoursels comfortable here for the next few days, as he's awa to Glasga for a time."

"Oh, how capital!" exclaimed Jeanie; "no trouble of looking out for another place."

"It is very good and kind of him," said her sister more gently, while Esmé added impulsively—

"So good and kind that we really ought, all of us, to go in a body"——

"In four bodies," interrupted Miss Terry. But Esmé paid no heed to the interruption, as she continued with a dignified sternness of tone, "Go in a body to thank him."

"Go in wings it's ye'd ha' to do," said the

landlady, with a grim little smile at her own wit, "if ye want to gie the thanks at ance, for Mr. Robinson's no lie-a-bed. He was up and awa wi' the first boat to Greenock."

Miss Wilson's cheeks flushed a little as she asked, "And do you know when he will be back again?"

No, that the landlady did not know. She had no further information to give about his present movements, than that the gentleman had said he hoped to have the pleasure of seeing them all again before they left those parts.

The young ladies echoed the hope, especially Esmé, who felt conscience-stricken at having called him Mr. Casby, the patriarch.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WE CAN DO WITHOUT."

HAVING no search to make for lodgings, and no benefactor to thank, the tourists made up their minds to take a day of leisurely enjoyment, and to put off more adventurous efforts till the morrow: a bathe in the clear waters of the little bay, a long, restful chatter on its margin, and then, during a saunter round it, the sight of a number of people,—nearly all the small town contained, in fact,—gathering up together at the entrance of a short lane leading past a cobbler's hut to the present centre of attraction.

"What are they all looking at? a Punch-and-Judy show or a monkey?" wondered Esmé, with visions of Brighton and Hastings sands before her.

"I guess they are watching for ever so much more interesting an exhibition than that to begin," said "'cutter" Alice Terry. "It's my belief they are all on the look-out for the hour when certain bits of folded paper are to be shown to them with their own names on; at least, when some of them

will see such, and when those who don't will look as penniless children do outside a sweetstuff store at Christmas-time. Come along! Let us see if there are any bits of folded paper yonder for us, at any rate."

"Whatever do you mean?" exclaimed Jeanie, with such a perfectly puzzled face that even Flora laughed, and Esmé said in a loud whisper—

"Don't hurt her feelings, poor thing, Jeanie. I reckon that's the Yankee way of talking about post-offices and letters; so, as she says, come along, for I expect there is certain to be news from home for me. Papa is sure to have written to me again by this time."

Alice expected a letter from her mother, and the Campbells thought it quite possible that a letter might be forwarded to them from Felmer Hall from their brother, so the steps of the whole party were as quick as those they had been rather wonderingly watching, as they hurried up to the general morning rendezvous; for in those primitive parts you must fetch your letters if you want them, and your newspaper, as well as what slender amount of groceries you can obtain, also not unfrequently your bread and milk supply; and for meat—well—

"That you must just go withoot the day, since ye ordered nane when Fraser cam' round wi's cart. He rang his bell loud enough for certain as he passed ye by on your way down the road, for I looked after

ye to see what ye'd buy, and if, maybe, it wad be what I'd like to cook for ye."

So spoke independent Ailsa Menzies when the four young ladies, rich with spoils from the small struggle at the post-office, suddenly remembered that they had taken no thought for a future meal before leaving their lodgings after breakfast. Accordingly, clasping tightly enough their respective "bits of folded paper with their names on," they set off briskly for their temporary home, and presented themselves before Mrs. Menzies, with a quiet request to be served with mutton chops and potatoes while opening their letters.

Mrs. Menzies shrugged her shoulders. "For the potatoes, aye, leddies, ye can ha' the potatoes, but what ye'll eat wi' them, that's another thing."

"Yes," agreed Alice Terry, laughing, "quite another thing, I am glad to say. Potatoes are one kind of thing, meat is another, and we'll eat meat with our potatoes, if you please."

"Nay, then," was the unsatisfactory answer. "It's just that ye will not do. The potatoes ye can ha', an' welcome, but for the meat, that ye must go withoot."

"It's my fault," said Flora, with a penitent look at Esmé Wilson. "I ought to have remembered these sort of things, but my four years in England have made me forget so much. I am so very, very sorry for you, Esmé dear."

"Why for me?" asked Esmé rather quickly. "Say for all of us, Flora; we have all got to go without."

"Yes, but it is different for us," was the gentle answer. "We shall not mind, and it won't hurt any of us."

Esmé turned away without another word, and carried her letters with her indoors. The rosy lips had gone into a discontented pout as she listened to the possibility, or rather the great probability, of having to do without dinner again, but now the lips were quivering in a way that betokened their owner very near the verge of crying. Fair-haired, rosy-faced, childlike Esmé was beginning to learn a lesson thus early in the days of their holiday tour, a lesson which the three young governesses were teaching all unconsciously, but which was at least as valuable a one as any they had ever yet taught.

In spite of her pink and white face Esmé Wilson was as healthy as any of her companions, in spite of her indolence she was as strong, in spite of her little pouts and growls she was really quite as well able as any of them to put up with the various little discomforts of life, and was no more sensitive at any rate than Flora Campbell. But—a very important but—her three companions bore everything and put up with everything so much more patiently than she did, that not only they but she

herself had fallen into the way of supposing that, at any rate for her, everything was to be made as smooth as possible. For the first time her eyes had begun to open that morning at the words of the landlady, followed up, as they had been, by Alice Terry's speech as to the certainty that Miss Campbell would try to take the same view of things as did "queen Esmé." In the nursery "queen Esmé" had always had things made pretty smooth for her. At school, governesses and professors had striven their utmost to lessen the labour of learning for the childlike, pouting-lipped, young maiden. Her friends petted her, her parents petted her, every one petted her in short, with the one exception of the dictatorial elder sister, and it had been all well enough that it should be so until she had grown into the way of petting herself, then mischief was at work.

Esmé took herself into a few moments' solitude with those words still sounding within her heart—"I am so very, very sorry for you, Esmé dear. It is different for us, we shall not mind, and it won't hurt any of us."

"It is not different," murmured the quivering red lips. "And as for hurting, if going without proper things is likely to hurt any of us, it is certainly first of all Flora herself."

She opened one of her letters. "Father's bonnie bird," it began. "Father's selfish little wretch,"

corrected the young lady in a doleful mutter. "That's what the words ought to be."

Unhappily a good deal of the penitent waking mood faded away during the reading of the second letter. That was from Elinor Wilson, and as usual called forth all the worst points in her sister's character.

"Flora, there are two ways of putting the same thing," said Esmé a quarter of an hour later, when her companions had finished reading and re-reading their own especial precious epistles, and had put them by.

As she spoke Esmé put her arm round Flora Campbell, and drew her down into a seat beside her, holding the two letters towards her at the same time. One of them began abruptly—"O Esmé! how can you do such things? Papa is in a fine way, I can tell you, about your madcap announcement as to walking round the island of Arran. Of course, I have told papa that he need have no fear of your really doing it. Many folks can talk big, but it takes courage and perseverance to do things. Meantime I think you may perhaps have the civility to write and tell papa that you are sorry to have angered him with such a silly boast."

The other letter began—"Father's bonnie bird. I feared, my darling, that I should not have time to write to you to-day, so I asked Elinor, before I left home, to do so for me, to beg you to let us

have a line directly you have accomplished your adventurous trip, that we may be assured of the safety of yourself and your friends, and that you are not over-tired. When your mother and I first read the news of your intention, we were half inclined to be frightened. But we soon got over that feeling. We have too much trust in Miss Campbell to believe she will willingly lead her party into danger, and now we are rejoicing in the expectation of seeing our lassie return to us as robust and energetic as a Scottish maiden."

As Esmé Wilson folded her letters after her friend had read these two extracts she said quietly, as much in reality with reference to her own recent reflections as to her words at breakfast—

"After reading these, you must say yourself that there is some excuse for me, Flora."

A faint sigh was the first answer. Then she said gently, "Poor little Esmé! I should almost say so, perhaps; only, Esmé dear, a memory comes to me, 'Who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.' He came to be our example, as well as our Saviour."

"Flora! Esmé! where are you?" called Alice's voice at this moment, and without another word the two rose and went out again into the sunshine, Flora, by some hidden impulse, bending to kiss Jeanie's forehead as she came up to her, a caress which the younger sister returned by lifting the

hand nearest her and laying her cheek against it for an instant before she dropped it again, and running to Esmé, clasped her in her arms, and danced with her round the court, singing the while.

"Whisht, bairns, wisht ye, then," ejaculated Ailsa Menzies. "Ye ha' nane o'er muckle sense, I'm thinkin', withoot whirling your brains that gate."

The reproachfulness of her tone was somewhat modified by the admiration in her eyes. Nevertheless, having accomplished the circuit Jeanie set her partner in the impromptu dance free, and with laughing face said—

"Surely, ma'am, you don't think it proves any want of brains that we are delighted to hear we are, after all, to get some dinner. What do you think, Esmé? Your dear and most especially estimable Mr. Casby, the patriarch"——

Esmé put her hand over her companion's mouth. "Whisht, Jeanie, as Mrs. Menzies says. I won't have you repeat that again. It's too bad of you. You know how sorry I am to have said such a thing. It is a hard lesson to me against judging people again. But what about Mr. Robinson now? Has he come back already?"

"No, indeed, something far better than that. A man has just come up with some fish, which he says 'the douce Mr. Robinson telt him to fetch awa to the young leddies up here, wi' his compliments, if ony were caught the morn.' I expect he guessed

that our housekeeper, Miss Campbell, would forget to order us poor things any dinner. But you shall not starve now, my dear Esmé. Fresh-caught broiled fish and piles of floury potatoes with bowls of milk make a dinner fit for a queen."

"And as it is nearly time to enjoy that same, and I see the fish are already on the fire," added Alice briskly, "I will just go in and lay the cloth, while you take a rest, Queenie my dear, in the rocking-chair you have taken such a fancy to."

The tolerably frequent frown appeared on Miss Wilson's fair forehead as she answered rather sharply, "I wish, Alice, you would not be always making me out to be such a lazy, useless creature. Go and rest in the rocking-chair yourself, if you think it such a pleasant thing to do. I daresay Jeanie and I are capable of setting the dinner-table."

And poor little waking Esmé marched in to Mrs. Menzies' domain to ask for knives and forks, with her dainty small head as high in the air as it could be made to go. Five minutes later she pulled Alice into a quiet corner and whispered, "O Alice! don't think me very, very hateful, please don't."

"Hateful!" whispered back Alice in amazement. "You don't know how much I love you, Esmé, or you would not say such things as that. But you are tired now, you poor little thing!"

Esmé threw back her head with fresh impatience. "No, no, Alice! That is the worst of it. I am not

tired, not a bit, only miserable at seeing what a wretchedly selfish thing you all take me to be, and—and—I am. I begin to think that Elinor is right, and that I am the most horrid creature that ever lived."

"And I am beginning to think that you are more wrong than usual," was the reply, with a very April smile. "How comes it, Esmé, if you are so very horrid, that you were by far the best-loved girl at school?"

"Oh, that was only because—because I was small."

"Nonsense and rubbish, Queenie! There were several as small, and smaller, as you well know. It was because you were winning, and gracious, and generous-hearted, and honest; that was why we all loved you, and why every one goes on loving you. Why, you must see yourself that you have even turned this Scotch Mrs. Gruff-a-nuff into sugar. And one word for all, madam, if you don't go on letting me go on petting and spoiling you according to my own fancy, I guess I shall just dwindle away like a bit of melting candy or a withered butter-nut."

"What is that you are saying about butter?" asked Jeanie, coming into the inner room. "Mrs. Menzies says that we have eaten up all Mr. Robinson's generous supply, and shall we make an expedition up the glen this afternoon ourselves to

some farmhouse to buy more, or shall she get one of her laddies to bring us some on his way home from work at the manse?"

"Oh, go and buy for ourselves by all means," exclaimed Esmé, springing forward. Then, recollecting her new resolves, she added hastily, with flushing cheeks, "I mean—at least—what do you all think?"

"The foraging expedition of course," said Alice, laughing, with a nod full of mischievous meaning at Esmé, and then they went to dinner, and agreed with Jeanie that they had a royal feast, thanks to their new friend, and in spite of their own inexperienced forgetfulness that meals did not always place themselves on tables at regular hours, and just when heedless young ladies happened to require them.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TOP OF GOATFELL.

"It's all F U D—I beg your pardon, Miss Flora Campbell, but you know Mrs. Menzies' remark about my making a clever boy bairn, the day before yesterday, has made me a trifle uncertain as to the words that are the most fitting for me to use. Is 'fudge' one of them?"

"I shall charge you twopence a week for instruction if you don't take care," was the smiling answer. "But what especial deception, real or fancied, has aroused your indignation this beautiful morning?"

"Why the beautiful morning itself, to be sure," answered Miss Alice Terry. "'Mists, nothing but mists; rain, nothing but rain,' threatened everybody for my comfort and encouragement when they heard that I was coming to Scotland. And accordingly I provided myself with that unhealthiest of garments (at least folks say so), a waterproof dress, likewise a waterproof cloak and a waterproof hat. I did enter into some negotiations as to being waterproofed myself, but I was told that the process

was likely to prove both sticky and stiffening—not according to taste, like cookery-book sugar and salt, but according to weather. So I happily relinquished that project, but the waterproof garments remain, sad-coloured satires upon ”——

“The sunshine,” interrupted Jeanie.

“No, ma’am ; upon my back,” was the retort. “Flora, don’t I go up a place for my quickwittedness ? Of course I was going to say the sunshine, if that scaramouche had not taken the words out of my mouth.”

“Make your mouth smaller,” suggested Esmé, “perhaps then you may be able to keep your words to yourself.”

“What a terrible thing that would be for such a chatterbox !” laughed Flora as she rose from the breakfast-table, and at the same time drew the loaf towards her, and began cutting bread and butter with an activity that seemed more proper to the beginning of a meal than to its end. However, the puzzle was soon solved. Mrs. Menzies’ tall, broad form appeared in the open doorway of the shanty.

“An’ weel, leddies, ye’ll maybe no be forgetting that ye’ll be wantin’ dinners to-day, for there’s nae douce Mr. Robinson to the fore the morn to fend for feckless bairns.”

“Feckless bairns indeed !” ejaculated Alice, drawing up her slight, lithe form to almost as great a height as that of the muscular Scotchwoman her-

self. "Say rather, ma'am, brave pioneers of civilized emancipation from the thralldom of womanish weakness."

"Hech, then," gasped Ailsa, "was it a laddie I said ye suld ha' been? I reckon then it must ha' been a minister I meant, for ye ha' a power o' words, an' na doubt o' that, in your mouth, an' nane o'er douce in soond neither."

"Not like Mesopotamia for example?" asked Alice demurely, while the other three girls, after a vain effort to restrain themselves, broke out into peals of laughter. Their landlady's ideas of the special attributes useful for a minister, and apparently only needful, according to her way of putting the case, were certainly peculiar. But they had no time to waste even in the holiday pastime of laughter just then. They were bent on devoting the fine day to an excursion up Goatfell, and a picnic on the top of the mountain of egg-sandwiches, scones, buttered oatcake, and pears. Accordingly, having asked Mrs. Menzies to buy a piece of neck of mutton for them when the butcher's cart came round, if there were any to be had, as provision for a high tea on their return in the evening, they hurried on with their preparations, that the first part of the climb might be accomplished before the sun got to the height of his power, to breathe over them a possible spell of laziness.

Each carried her own share of provisions. Alice

had wished to carry two portions, as she had done during the past week of their rambles, but on this occasion Esmé insisted on carrying her own.

"You are afraid that I shall eat half of it, that is the fact, I see," said Alice.

"Of course it is," assented Esmé, laughing.

But Alice managed to get a double burden to carry for the common good after all, for she got Mrs. Menzies to lend her a quart wine-bottle which she filled with tea, and thankful enough her companions were when she brought forth her treasure out of her bag on the top of the mountain, or rather just before that final worst bit of the climb over the great, steep granite slabs, and shared its contents with the thirsty company. They had all indulged in great tumblers of new milk at the Duke's dairy-house at the foot of the mountain, but long before their upward expedition was accomplished, under a brilliant sun and such a perfectly cloudless sky as made travelled Esmé think that she must have been transported in some magic way to Italy instead of Scotland, all the party had taken to quoting Coleridge's awful line—

"Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink."

After every dozen yards or so of springing through the long grass and heather, or stumbling over ruts and dry watercourses, a simultaneous pause was



ON THE TOP OF GOATFELL.

—Page 97.

made, a little, it may have been, with a view to resting and getting back spent breath, but the avowed object was to turn, and yet again and again admire the view over the fir-trees of the beautiful bay, whose waters looked so tempting to hot and thirsty individuals.

Esmé's unaccustomed London feet made the expedition to the top of Goatfell a much longer one than it would have been to the others without her; and Alice Terry was secretly quite rejoiced that, long before the crown was reached, fatigue, and just a little amount of terror at the tittamatorter-looking boulders, had banished from her small, childlike companion all memory of her new resolutions to be independent and self-reliant, as well as unselfish. The two strong ones of the party, Alice and Jeanie, had several times almost carried Esmé between them over some especially rough bit, before they all at length dropped themselves down on the very top of the stone plateau, beside a little stone basin of the clearest of clear water, to enjoy with silent ecstasy as lovely a scene as can be found anywhere.

"There is even the mist to make my cup of contentment full," murmured Alice at last, in low, hushed tones, as though she feared that louder ones might break some spell, and prove the beautiful landscape lying around them nothing but a fading vision.

Jeanie lifted her head from her sister's lap. "Where is the mist, Alice? Is it in your eyes, by

way of tribute to this glorious Scottish land of ours ? for I can see it nowhere else."

"Come here then, unbeliever, and I will show it to you," was the still quiet-voiced reply.

And Jeanie rose and crossed past Esmé, who also moved a foot or two nearer to the American girl thus for once moved to so deep a quietude. Rapidly she had taken in all the vivid, visible beauty of the wide-spread, sun-illumined landscape, waters, islands, mainland, even farmsteads and little whitewashed cottages, all plainly to be distinguished. But now the brown eyes, deep and dark with strong emotion as her companions had never seen them before, were fixed with strange intentness on that mist of which she had spoken.

To the right of where she had chosen her seat, between two neighbour mountains, lay that great mysterious purple depth. So soft it looked, so thick, so close, an imaginative human being who should have dropped into it in search of a safe and peaceful couch might almost have escaped the charge of foolishness. So strange, so rich, so beautiful, and the girl's eyes gazed into it with a rapt longing that seemed as though, from very intensity, it must penetrate the mystery.

"If only I could see into that," she murmured at last. "It is life!"

"It is life!" repeated Jeanie, with a look and tone of surprise.

"Like life," corrected her companion with a shade of impatience at the want of comprehension of her figurative language. "That mist is like life, so plainly to be seen on the surface, so soft and simple looking, and such a weak thing too at the same time. And yet in some ways it is so powerful, it is so beautiful, it is so marvellous, and none of us know what lies hidden within it. I strive to pierce with my eyes through that purple, impalpable, unfathomable mist, with the persistent feeling that if I could penetrate its depth I could also read my own life. After all, to do one is as easy as to do the other. Both are impossible. But I no longer wonder that the Scotch are superstitious where religion has not taught them faith."

CHAPTER X.

COWS!

ALICE'S unusual and unexpected meditative fit lasted so long that at last unpoetical Jeanie gave her a slight hint to come out of it, by asking in a tolerably emphatic tone—

“Esmé, aren't you very hungry? I know I am beginning to think that e_g-sandwiches promise to be the most delightful-tasting food in the world.”

“Yes,” agreed Esmé, laughing. “And oatcake too, with that delicious fresh butter on it.”

And then Alice Terry came out of her dream, and with the bright mischief of ordinary times seasoned the mountain repast so pleasantly that no one thought of moving, until Flora suddenly noticed that the mist was spreading, and on looking at her watch she was startled to find that it was already past five o'clock. Up jumped all four girls, a hurried consultation was held as to who knew the path by which they had come up, and then they set off as

fast as they could downwards, wasting no breath in further speech for some time.

"Oh!" That was the first word that had been uttered for ten minutes.

At the sound of that sharp scream Flora and Jeanie Campbell, and Alice Terry, all uttered answering cries of terror, and gazed around them to discover what there was to scream at. Whether or no there were anything to scream at, they soon found there was something to scream for. Esmé Wilson was nowhere to be seen, and with that cruel quickness of which thought is capable, all sorts of terrible suggestions rushed into the three girls' minds as to the mode of her disappearance. Flora grew white and faint, tears rushed into Jeanie's eyes, ready to fall at the first hint of a sign that they were due to friendship, and a characteristic little frown showed itself on the broad forehead of Alice Terry.

"Esmé! where are you, Esmé?" she called with a quick, short hastiness of accent that would have led a stranger to her to imagine her angry, rather than anxious, at her friend being thus unexpectedly missing. "Speak," she added hastily again; "where are you?"

"Why, here," said a voice not a couple of yards distant, and very near the ground, whence it ascended with a tone divided between ruefulness and an inclination to laugh. "Alice might well say that it was not safe to take long steps in this part of the

world, Flora. Even short ones have landed me in a fox's hole."

"Buried you, you mean, you small burrowing rabbit," corrected Alice, stretching down her hands as she spoke to clasp those of her companion.

Esmé had tumbled into a deep hole almost up to her shoulders, as she ploughed her way through the long coarse grass, which so treacherously concealed that, and many other stumbling-blocks, in the course they had chosen for their return. It was with some difficulty that she was pulled out and once more placed on a level with her friends.

"There, madam," said Alice, with a little extra flush on the brunette cheeks from her exertion. "Now let me warn you not to go indulging in your underground amusements any more to-day, for it's getting late. I'm growing lean to scarecrowiness with hunger, and moreover, last but not least, I reckon that there is a mist coming out that might perchance mean more than dampness in our present guideless situation."

"Coming on, I suppose you mean, Miss Croker," said Jeanie, glad enough to exchange tears for laughter. "Coming *out*, indeed! Who ever heard of a mist coming out!"

"Not poor benighted Scotch lassies, no doubt," was the calm retort. "It takes a wise American woman to discover that Scotch mists come out of the boggy ground, and not on from the sea?"

“As they do, of course, in a poor, fog-bound Yankee-land!”

“Flora!” called Alice, “your younger sister’s ignorance of common geographical facts is truly awful. She does not even know where to go if she wishes to behold for once a true blue sky, and to breathe a pure atmosphere.”

“Very sad,” replied Flora. “But at the present moment I think it is still more to be regretted that neither she, nor any of us, knows if we are going the right road to get away from Goatfell. I was very anxious to get to it a few hours ago, but I am still more anxious to leave it and its shadows behind me now, for I quite agree with you that a mist is getting ready to envelop us, and if it does, it won’t make much difference whether it has come out or on, or up or down.”

“That is just what I have been thinking,” agreed Esmé, who had happily been only shaken and not hurt by her fall; and passing her arm through Flora’s for mutual safety, she prepared to put her best foot forward towards that dark wood below them. The mist grew thicker. The four girls kept close together and fell into silence. There was an unconfessed feeling in each heart that the time had come for taking some care of breath and strength. As quickly as was consistent with necessary caution, and was possible from the rugged nature of the ground, they plodded onwards and

downwards, ever keeping that thick line of green before them, and trying to flatter themselves that they recognised the same trees, the same piece of paling, the same felled trunks they had seen when they issued from the wood in the bright flood of sunlight at the outset of their expedition.

But it is one thing to try to believe a circumstance, and another to find the effort justified.

Flora's face had become momentarily graver as they neared their present immediate goal, when suddenly Esmé once more was the one to break in upon the silence with a cry. The whole hurrying party stood still.

"What is it now, Esmé?" asked Alice, with just a touch of irritable impatience in her voice.

"Why, the cows!" gasped Esmé. "We almost tumbled over one." And surely enough a huge, wide-horned beast, looming to her eyes as a most awful apparition in the mist, rose up nearly from their very feet, fixed great solemn reproachful-looking eyes upon its disturbers, and slowly—to Esmé's thinking, barbarously slowly—moved a few feet away to the nearer neighbourhood of a gathering-up circle of companions.

"Oh, come, come on!" breathed that frightened young Cockney. "Let us run!"

And suiting the action to the word, as Flora did not seem inclined to run, she pulled her hand from her arm and set off to run by herself.

"There you go again!" exclaimed Alice Terry the next moment. "I should not wonder, you tiresome baby, if you have really hurt yourself this time."

Esmé certainly had succeeded in doing a very neat and polite action now, for after stumbling on for about a couple of yards or so over bits of rock and broken lumps of earth and holes, she had brought herself up at last by a threatened pitch head foremost, which had resolved itself into a dropping on her knees before one of the objects of her dread, who appeared considerably astonished at the performance. There she remained still as a statue.

"Are you really hurt?" asked Flora, with pitying anxiety.

"I—I—don't know," whispered back Esmé, staring at the cow, as Alice said, like a frog staring at a snake in the Zoological Gardens.

But merciful Jeanie took pity on her, and drove off the cattle, and helped her friend on to her feet again.

"Next time you go travelling, my dearly beloved small Cockney," said Alice Terry, laughing, "I advise you to advertise for a country where the natives import all their butter and milk."

"Or only keep goats," answered Esmé with a sigh. "I really think the barbarous human beings who turn out all these wild beasts for the torturing

terror of their fellow-creatures deserve to be hung, if that wasn't too quick punishment for their unfeeling cruelty."

"I wish we could hang this mist," called back Jeanie, "on a gallows the other side of Goatfell; that would be more useful for us at present."

"Aye! or on the other side of yesterday, which would be better still," rejoined Alice. "And what we are to do now I should be very glad if the captain in command would tell us, for if we have returned to the wood at the place we left it, all I can say is, that some spiteful individual has taken the pains to obliterate the gate, for never a one is there here."

"It may be lower down," said Esmé; and accordingly the girls divided, two going one way, two the other. But no gate could they discover. The one they had come out at was, in reality, ever so far round. After a minute or two both divisions turned, and reunited with faces more blank than before.

"Well," said Flora at last in a decided tone, "it is no good to dawdle any longer; that is only making matters worse. We must climb over."

"All right!" was the ready response from Alice, forthwith giving a helping hand to Esmé to surmount the difficulties of a double fence of paling and hedge.

Jeanie lingered behind a moment to say, rather seriously, "But Flora, no gate means no path, you

remember—at least, at any rate no direct one anywhere out of the wood.”

“ I know that, dear,” answered Flora Campbell, with an anxious glance at her young sister. For herself, she would have made light of the apparent possibility of a night out on the chill side of a mist-covered mountain of her native land, but she regarded the same prospect very differently as connected with those others now with her, and, above all, as associated with her beloved young sister.

“ I see nothing better to do, dear,” she added after a moment's pause, and with a scarcely suppressed sigh. “ We shall do no good by staying where we are ; we cannot find the gate, and we may hope to find the right path inside the wood.”

As though in reply to that hope Alice now shouted from the interior, “ Hurrah ! come along. Here's a path, and it must be a right one to somewhere, for it is quite a good width.”

CHAPTER XI.

ONE THING TO FIND A PATH, ANOTHER THING TO FOLLOW IT.

"WHAT are you waiting for, Alice?" called Jeanie over the head of Esmé Wilson, who was just in front of her, and who had been rather sharply brought to a standstill by the abrupt pause of the present leader of the expedition.

In virtue of Alice Terry having been the one to find the woodland path they had been following, she had been awarded the post of vanguard of the exploring party, and in spite of dimness, a rough ground, and obtruding roots, she had led on with swift steps and merrily for some minutes, when she thus suddenly signalled a halt. Jeanie's question receiving no immediate answer, her sister called past her—

"What is it, Alice? What are you waiting for? What is the matter? Are you hurt?"

"Yes, deeply, terribly," came the reply solemnly, in the tone of a tragedy queen. "My friends and companions in adversity, I am wounded to the very depths of my capacious heart. It is dangerous to

trust in man, I know, but I did think that I might trust a path! If a big street in a big city deceived one, of course one would feel grieved, but yet the fault could be attributed to the force of evil example. But to find a little innocent-looking, secluded woodland path lending itself to such heartless, such cruel deception! Oh, it is too much! I am overcome!"

"It's very sad, and I'm very sorry for you, whatever you may mean," called out Jeanie again; "but meantime, as we all want to get back to Brodick, do you mind being overcome when we are going to sit down to tea instead of now, and for the present reviving your drooping spirits and proceeding onwards?"

"There is no onwards and I cannot proceed," was the Sphinx-like answer, as Miss Alice Terry moved on one side as far as the nature of the place would let her, thus tacitly inviting some one else forthwith to take the post of leader. All three of her companions at once crowded up about her—not, indeed, with any superabundant eagerness to usurp her post, but to learn with their eyes the meaning of the ambiguous sentences which had puzzled their ears. One glance was enough.

"It is quite true! There is no onwards," gasped Esmé, adopting the significant language in which her friend had announced the fact that the path had come to an end.

"And the miserable little thing has taken us nowhere!" ejaculated Jeanie, giving the purposeless path a small kick of indignation with her heel as she spoke.

Flora's comment on its treachery was a sigh and a rather anxious glance at Esmé. Alice's brown eyes were also cast furtively in the same direction, and it so happened that the young lady who was the chief object of solicitude in the present emergency caught the gaze of both pairs of eyes. Then she turned hastily away to hide the burning flush which suddenly suffused her cheeks, grown pale from fatigue and worry during the last half-hour. Mastering her emotion by a strong effort, she electrified her hesitating companions by facing right about again on the path they had just traversed, and said briskly—

"Well, come along, all of you. We are pretty much in the dark just now about most things, it is true; but one matter at least is certain—we shall gain nothing by lingering at the tail end of this deceitful little ladder of learning. And for once in my life I'll be leader, and a pretty quick one too, I can tell you; so just put your best feet forward, and step out, and you'll see if I don't get you all out of this Hampton Court Maze somehow."

"If you do I'll waive my right to a share of that jar of strawberry jam, bestowed upon us by your Mr. Casby," said Alice with renewed spirit, as she

prepared to retrace her steps, looking quite ready for any number of adventures or misadventures, now that she was reassured as to Esmé having strength to continue on the tramp.

They had not proceeded far on the return when Esmé came to a halt, almost as sharply as Alice Terry had done ten minutes since, and again Jeanie called out, "What is it? What is the matter now, Esmé? Has this mysterious path cut itself off short here too, so that there no longer remains an onwards for us anywhere?"

"Not exactly," was the answer, "But, Alice, had you any special reason for not turning off into this broad path here?"

"None whatever," replied Alice, "excepting the all-sufficient one that I did not see it."

And neither had any of them. They had been too intent on following the aggravating path to nowhere to let their eyes stray to anything else. Now the case was different. And off at right angles, with fresh vigour along the fresh road, again started Esmé. Down, down, down, hurried the four girls, descending lower at every step, which was, of itself, a hopeful sign; and, moreover, this path bore better evidence of being in tolerably frequent use than the one they had left. At last the leader broke the silence with a glad shout—

"Hurrah! Flora, I see a gate. We are out of the maze."

Jeanie ran forward to her side to verify the good news with her own eyes. But although she discovered the gate, Esmé was surprised and disappointed to perceive that her companion's elation by no means equalled her own.

"Why Jeanie," she said rather impatiently, "how disgusted you look! Did you really wish to be obliged for once in your life to try sleeping a night out of doors?"

"No, thank you," was the reply. "But I do not wish either to try what a prison bed may be like, and that gate yonder is fastened with a padlock, don't you see, and moreover leads into the private grounds of the castle. Flora, what do you think we had better do now? Skirt the hedge or go back again?"

"Neither," exclaimed Esmé Wilson before Miss Campbell could answer. "I would far rather be popped away in one of the dungeons of that comfortable-looking little castle, if it has any, than risk sleeping, or rather waking, all night on Goatfell with cows and bogies for company. So there!"

And with that final "So there!" off the young lady set in a rapid run to the gate, followed by Alice, who took her view of the matter, and the two had climbed it, and sprung down on the other side while the Scotch sisters still stood debating as to the possibility of venturing to trespass on their countryman's domain.

"Esmé," whispered Alice, "beg them to come. Tell them that you are tired."

"So I am," answered Esmé aloud and fretfully. She was irritated at what was, according to her way of thinking, such a very foolish delay. "Do come, Flora," she added, "pray do. The mist is getting thicker, I am sure, and the Duke and Duchess cannot eat us even if they should see us. I will tell them I am English, and that my father is a member of parliament."

"All the worse then, they may very easily say," said Flora with a smile, as she came slowly forward. "We might perhaps be forgiven, but I wonder what sort of fate a trespasser like you can expect. Actually the ringleader in this daring deed, although the daughter of a man especially bound to uphold the laws. Do you not tremble at what may befall you?"

"Not a fiftieth part as much as I should tremble if I had to go back amongst those cows," replied Miss Esmé, with hardihood very common to small, bright-haired, soft-cheeked maidens in such dilemmas. She held out eager hands to help Flora over the gate, and when the two sisters were both on the same side with her, the colour of reviving hope and courage began to come back to her cheeks.

"What is to be the next step in our proceedings pray, Queenie, now that you have brought us so far

H

in our search after man-traps and spring-guns? What is the next danger we are to run into?" asked Jeanie, as she stooped to unhook her dress from a nail in the gate.

Esmé looked about her thoughtfully. Alice did the same. "To walk quietly up to the doors of the castle itself, explain our position, and request a guide home, would be the simplest plan," was the cool American suggestion. But the impudent calmness of the idea was not to be claimed by America only. Miss Esmé's blue eyes were as full of grave earnest as her friend's were full of mischievous fun as she said sedately—

"Yes, Alice; there is nothing to laugh about in that proposal. I have just been thinking, myself, that to go at once straight to the castle would be the very wisest thing we could do. They could do nothing worse to us than keep us there, and as we are ladies they must give us beds to sleep on, and decent food. In fact, the more I think of it the more it seems to be just the very one thing to do. Come along! It will be night before we get in anywhere, if we do not make haste."

But although those last words stated an undeniable fact, and although Esmé's reasoning as to the propriety and advisability of invading the Duke of Hamilton's castle appeared so very conclusive to herself, it happened that Flora Campbell thought

differently, and, with all her affectionate regard for her dearly loved schoolfellow's wishes, she very resolutely withstood them in the present instance.

"Well," said Esmé at last, with a little pout, but a look of half-conviction, it must be confessed, at the same time, that her friend's judgment was wiser than her own,—“Well, if you won't let us do one simple thing, we must do another. I should be the leader up to that dear little castle with the best will in the world. But never mind; follow me now along that nice broad gravel path down there: it looks civilised at any rate, and free of cows.”

“And better still,” added Flora, “as it seems to be the carriage-drive from the castle it must terminate in a gate on to the highroad.”

“What fun then, if, after all, the Duke and Duchess should drive in before we get out, and find Miss Campbell trespassing after all,” said Esmé mischievously. But Flora looked so genuinely distressed at the idea, that she repented of her words almost as soon as they were spoken, and swinging her little round blue cloth hat in her hand by the elastic, she walked along very soberly towards the hoped-for gate.

Flora's prediction proved right. Two or three minutes had passed when the gate came in sight, a tremendously high one; so high, indeed, that Alice involuntarily exclaimed—

"Well, Queenie, it is to be hoped for your sake that that gate is not locked, like the last one."

But a high gate was neither a cow nor a tittama-torta-hanging, huge granite boulder on the side of a mountain, looking as if a touch or a breath would displace it, and send it crashing down over any unhappy ladies standing in its way. Esmé was not afraid of gates, high or low. She was much more concerned as to the relation of that gate before her, as regarded distance, to the house of Mrs. Menzies, than she was about its formidable height.

"Where shall we be when we get through or over that gate, Flora? that is the point to be thought of now," she observed by way of answer to Alice; but the reply was not satisfactory.

"We shall be on the highroad, Esmé dear, evidently," said Miss Campbell, "for I see the glimmer of the bay through the mist. But that is all I can tell you, for I never came from Goatfell in the old days by this route."

"How nice for you then," remarked Alice laughing, "that we lost our way. For once you have seen something bran new in your own land."

"Or guessed at it," corrected Jeanie, "if you take into account this wet veil, Yankee dear. But I've noticed before that you never guess at anything but a certainty."

"I wish weather prophets and such creatures

would follow my example then," was the calm retort. "Come, Esmé, let us race Jeanie to the gate. Permission to sit at tea in the rocking-chair for the one who wins."

And tired as the girls really were, off they started as if they had just left home, Flora bestowing all her looks upon them, with thankfulness for the evidence that none of them were much exhausted. With the impetus of the run Esmé made a sudden spring at the gate, was up it, and seated on the top with a wave of her cap, and a shout of laughing triumph, before Alice had even had time to see if it were locked or no. Jeanie was about to jump up beside her, when to her terror Esmé snatched her own hands from the bar with a startled cry—

"Flora! are you four"——

Before she could complete her extraordinary question, or fall off the gate, she was caught and placed safely on the ground, and her question explained. Flora was not four people, but all the same there were four people besides the three runners now around the gate, and three of them were gentlemen. Five minutes ago Miss Esmé Wilson had expressed an opinion that it would be great fun to be caught trespassing in those ducal grounds by the lawful occupants; now the blushing, white-lidded face looked a very great deal more embarrassed

than the gentle, dignified countenance of Miss Campbell, who would have done a good deal to avoid the adventure, but did not lose her presence of mind now that it had come to her.

However, there was a silence of some moments after a pair of firm hands had grasped Esmé's trembling ones and helped her back to the path. It was broken at length by an amused and astonished exclamation from one of the strangers.

"Why, surely, young ladies, you are my friends of the shanty?"

All the girls looked eagerly at the speaker.

"Mr. Robinson!" breathed Jeanie. "But—you are in Glasgow."

"Say then," was the laughing reply, "that I am like the Irishman's bird, in two places at once, for I am Mr. Robertson, not Robinson, but still the person you mean, and I certainly am here. To explain the matter, I was found by a friend in Glasgow yesterday, and brought back here to-day, although not to the shanty. And now, may I ask, are you ladies also on a visit here?"

"No; we are lost."

And, as blue-eyed Esmé's lovely red lips gave that pitiful little simple bit of information, one of the two gentlemen standing a little behind Mr. Robertson thought that being lost was about one of the most becoming aids to feminine beauty that

could be devised. The next moment his opinion was still further strengthened when another of the lost maidens added in a low tone—

“Yes, sir, a sort of ‘Babes in the Wood’ modern version, that we have got up. We’ve done the first act, only your countrywoman objects to cows instead of robin redbreasts, so we’ve had to finish up our tragedy in a hurry like this.”

“But why, you trespassers,” questioned Mr. Robertson again, with a deprecatory glance round at the second of his companions, a stately gentleman, who was looking on at the scene with rather more surprise than amusement, “why did you choose these private grounds for your performances?”

“We did not choose them,” began Esmé.

“The force of circumstances,” began Alice Terry.

But then Miss Campbell came forward, and gravely explained the whole affair, ending earnestly, “And I trust that the liberty we have taken may be pardoned, for I truly feared many hours’ exposure on the bleak mountain-side for my friend Miss Wilson, and for my young sister.”

“I should think so, indeed,” said the dignified stranger who had not yet spoken, with sympathetic heartiness. “And for yourself too you should have feared. It would not be amiss to see about having some sort of signposts put up on our hoary old

giant yonder. Meantime, young ladies, if you will wait here a few minutes a waggonette shall be sent from the castle to take you to your lodgings, for they are at least three miles distant, and you all look fatigued. Indeed, you have full reason to be."

A word of request from the young man of the party, a word of courteous assent and thanks, and he flew off to hasten the carriage and the other matter which the stranger had found time in those few instants to confide to his charge. The stranger himself followed more leisurely, leaving Mr. Robertson to chat with the girls, and to receive their earnest thanks for his own kindness to them, until the carriage appeared. He helped them in, assured them again that he should not require his room for the next four or five days, the gate was unlocked, and with smiling faces they were driven off in state to their present home.

"And to high tea," said Alice Terry, hungrily. "By the by, Flora, whatever can be the meaning of this big basket at our feet?"

"Something being sent down in readiness for the early steamer to-morrow, to save another journey, most likely," said Flora indifferently, as she lay back in her corner of the comfortable carriage, enjoying to the full the rest, and the release from anxiety. Every now and then, for a half-hour or

so, the holiday trip proved rather more harassing to her, with her sense of responsibility for the whole party's well-being, than her work in the Felmer Hall schoolroom when the children's tempers or spirits were not in tune with their studies.

CHAPTER XII.

REGULAR BEGGARS.

"AILSA MENZIES," called the castle coachman as the waggonette drew up at the gate of the yard, and Ailsa Menzies came hurrying out, divided between relief at the return of her young lodgers and surprise at their conveyance.

"What is it then, Joe Saunders?" she asked in surprise. "What happens it that ye ha' been sent hame wi' the leddies? Is e'er a ain o' them kilt?"

"Aye, to be sure, ma'am, all of us. Don't you see?" laughed Alice, as she sprang out of the carriage.

The coachman's answer was a stolid, "I ken na mair than yoursel' why I ha' been sent here wi' the leddies. But ye'll ha' the gudeness to tak' out a basket that's in there for them. I suld ha' telt them, but I forgot, that it was put inside that, if happen they were hungry, they micht tak' a piece."

"Thank you," said Esmé, as she stretched up to put a half-crown into the man's hand. "We shall enjoy it more now."

As she passed her hand through Alice's arm and went in with her after the basket, she whispered mischievously—

"I am glad, madam, for that worthy Joe Saunders' forgetfulness. Why, you would have had 'pieces' enough by now to spoil your appetite altogether. I wonder what sort the 'pieces' are."

The general curiosity was soon satisfied. The man drove off, and the landlady brought the basket into the 'shanty.' On one of the handles was tied a leaf out of a notebook:—

"I trust, ladies, to be forgiven for sending this with you. I know, better than you are likely to do, the impossibility of getting food on the island at so late an hour."

"An' that's true enough for ye," commented the Scotchwoman, who stood by while the note was read. "An' ye'll nane find what I've gottin for ye the morn o'er tempting, I'm feared, so it's like this will be better."

The first things to be taken out were a couple of large cakes; a bottle of cream stood up at one corner, a basket of fruit hastily piled together in tempting disorder in another, and as foundation to all a couple of fine fowls and a cooked tongue, pressing into the side of a roll of butter yellow and firm feeling as a small column of African marble.

"So far so good," said Alice Terry with calm

approval. "If we go on like this we shall get quite famous. Put ourselves up as a show, at a shilling a head, as Miss Campbell's troupe. I believe that is the correct word"——

"What for?" asked Jeanie.

"Why, an aquarium or Christy Minstrel show. But ours will beat all those for strangeness and originality, for I'm quite sure that no one ever before thought of exhibiting a troupe of amateur female beggars."

"O Alice! how can you?" exclaimed Esmé.

"How can you, Alice? how horrid of you!" cried Jeanie, laughing and flushing.

"You really have made me feel as if we ought not to touch any of these things," said Flora more gently, but with her cheeks burning far more hotly than those of her friend or sister.

Alice's answer to all these remarks was a tranquil—"And now, if you please ma'am, for my teapot dolly, and a dish to put the tongue on. The fowls you will please take care of for us till to-morrow. Oh, and a big plate for a cake, please; and if my friend James brings it, he shall have a slice for himself.

And thus, the American significantly enough announced that she, at any rate, did not feel at all oppressed with shame or troublesome pride at her present rôle of beggar, and fully intended to profit by the good things bestowed upon the company.

Ten minutes later Esmé looked longingly, but very doubtingly, at some tempting red slices of tongue held towards her by Alice Terry. Certainly they looked very much more eatable than the greasy, sinewy, nondescript skin and bone, bits of mutton on a dish to match the tongue, as the nondescript brown of a beggar's garment may be said to match the rich hue of a sealskin mantle.

Apropos of nothing but that last comparison, I have often thought that, if I wanted in one moment to convey to an untaught mind the idea of hopelessness, I would just show him one of those dreary garbs of an almost unpaintable colour. But to go back to the cosy tea-party gathered in the West Highland wooden-built apartment. The members composing it were enjoying a luxurious liberty, very similar to that they had indulged in when the first day of the holidays found them all assembled in the governess's pleasant little sitting-room at Felmer Hall.

The table had been pulled up beside a little horse-hair sofa, introduced into the room during their absence, and on this Alice and Jeanie had insisted on placing Flora, whose Scotch vigour had for once failed somewhat under the strain of solicitude for her companions. Esmé had been pushed down into one rocking-chair, another had been fetched from the inner room, which Jeanie wanted to make

Alice take possession of, but it was determinedly refused.

"Much obliged for nothing, my dear child. My feet have been on the ground quite long enough. They are like myself, fond of change." And with that statement the young lady perched herself on the arm of the sofa, from which she bent down with considerable difficulty to carve the tongue.

"A week ago you talked about my looking as if I were learning how to hang myself on a clothes-line," said Esmé, watching the proceedings with half-alarmed interest. "I wonder what you think you look like now?"

"A skilful and long-backed credit to America, Miss Wilson," was the prompt reply. "And now permit me to offer you some ducal tongue, which looks almost as good as if it had been grown in the land of freedom. Indeed I should not wonder if it has. How many slices will you have to begin?—one dozen or two?"

"Two, without the dozen, if I have any. But really, Alice, after what you said, and after the fish too, and the pressed beef, and—and after—after everything"——

"You are such a silly little goose," added on Alice, "that really if you don't take care I may be making a mistake, and carrying you over to Mrs. Menzies to be put away in the larder as a fine specimen of the genus anser, to be served up to us for a

meal some future day. You are all a set of foolish mouses. If you were a party of travellers in Esquimaux land, you would be quite proud of being asked to share a blubber meal, and boast of it after."

"Of the offer, perhaps, but not of having shared the feast," shuddered Esmé, "for I shouldn't; so you have chosen a bad instance for once."

"Well, an Indian's rice then, or a Persian's bottle of sherbet, stored up out of the Arabian Tales, or a hot potato in an Irishman's cabin. You would think nothing of all that, or of a Chinaman's gift of a cup of tea, or some puppy-dog soup, or an isinglass bird's nest. And these picnic provisions come under the same category. They are bestowed on us because we are regarded as queer waifs and strays in a foreign land; impudent, but rather amusingly odd and helpless. If we were birds, we should, of course, be shot and stuffed, and put away in glass-cases with a piece of camphor beside us. But as we are not birds, and the narrow-minded law does not allow even independent-spirited, 'feckless,' stray young women of a queer mixture of cowardice and boldness, wit and ignorance, to be shot as specimens,—why, you see, we only get stuffed. I beg your pardon, Miss Campbell, for the use of that word, but you see my simile demanded it. And now, please set lassie Esmé a good example, and take this plate from me. Hand the bread-and-butter to Flora, please Esmé, and Jeanie"——

"Yes, ma'am. Please, ma'am, have you quite delivered the whole of your lecture?"

"Quite for the present. And I was about to observe, if you think that tea is drawn sufficiently, lecturing has a tendency to make the throat dry. Also, Flora likes cream but no sugar; I like as much of both as you choose to give me. Esmé likes a watery concoction, I have observed, over which she had better superintend herself."

Whether due to hunger, daintiness, Alice's eloquence, or its own appearance, or to all four causes together, all the young ladies eventually put by their scruples and enjoyed the tongue. The dish of imitation mutton cutlets, that had no perceptible connection with either loin of mutton or neck, preserved an untouched dignity which had a quite irresistible fascination for fastidious Esmé.

"I do believe, Esmé," said Jeanie at last, "that you have never taken your eyes for one moment from that dish of frizzly-looking mutton, for the past five minutes."

"No," allowed Esmé, grimly, "I hardly think I have. That slowly coagulating mass of dusky fat is about the most hideous sight I have ever seen."

"Then, why ever do you look at it?"

"Because I cannot help myself. It was the same with bogie-stories when I was a child. I hated them, but I always listened. I loathe that coagulating fat sight, but I must watch it."

"My poor little foolish child!" said Flora Campbell, with a pitying laugh.

"Yes," sighed Esmé, accepting the pity with an innocent accent of self-condolence, "it is hard upon a body to be so constituted. But seriously, I wonder who in the world can ever be found willing to eat such food."

"Bar cats, you mean?" query from the foot of the sofa.

"Aye, of course, or dogs either."

"All right! Done with you. 'I'll bet'——"

"Alice, Alice dear, what are you thinking of?" hastily remonstrated Miss Campbell, almost turning over the small table as she started up.

Alice twisted herself round on the sofa-end and folded her hands humbly. "Please, teacher, perhaps I was only going to bet that I'd be the first ready for cake."

Flora tried hard to keep down a smile as she answered gently, "But, Alice dear, you really must remember that you are not a boy, neither is Jeanie a boy to imitate you. And if either of you were, I confess I should see no special proof of boyhood or manliness in the use of such expressions as 'Done with you' or 'I'll bet.' What would Mrs. Elmslie say, think you, if she were to hear you say such things?"

"Guess I know, for I have heard," whispered Alice, as she slipped herself backwards down upon

the sofa, and put her lips for one moment on her friend's soft oval cheek.

Not many months since the young governess had heard, not only what her employer might say, but what she did say, anent a certain so-called boyish freedom of speech.

"I trust you, dear Miss Terry, implicitly, more implicitly it may be even than I would trust myself, never to do anything that could lead my children wrong, or influence them badly. But—forgive me for what I am about to say, for you are still very young; and I believe you do know that my friendship for you is both deep and sincere. If only, my dear, you would be a little more careful in your language and your choice of words. For little Charley it is less matter, but the girls all admire you so much that what you say they at once adopt and repeat, and it shocks their father."

All these well-remembered sentences rushed through Miss Alice Terry's hardly more than half-contrite memory, before Esmé came to the relief of a slightly embarrassing pause by asking—

"But Alice, bad as you were to try to inveigle me into betting, please satisfy my curiosity as to what it was to be about?"

"I've forgotten," with a solemn shake of the head. "Subject clean gone—I mean, gone glimmering."

"But it cannot have done so," expostulated Esmé

regretfully; "at least, if it has, I wish that it had taken that uneatable dish with it."

"That—un—eatable!" slowly repeated Alice. Then springing off the sofa she exclaimed, "Ah! of course, I recollect now," and running to the door she opened it, and called across the yard to their landlady, whose tall form was visible in the flickering firelight busy with some cookery.

"Mrs. Menzies," called Alice briskly, "have James and Jack had their porridge yet for supper?"

"Nay, my bairnie then, nay," came back sharply the stentorian-toned answer. "They ha' nae had their supper parritch yet, an' it's nane they'll be gettin' the night neither."

"Poor fellows!" called out Alice again, stepping out into the yard under the starlit sky, "how hungry they will be before the morning! Won't they starve?"

"Starve! heh!" with a scorn too supreme for further utterance. "An' if they did starve, a richt judgment wud it be upon them; fechtin' and tearin' they've been, o'er the piece ye gie to Jamie when he fetched the plate till ye."

"Oh, that was the matter, was it? How very bad to fight!" with a shake of the head at the two culprits, visible enough to each of the young ladies, those indoors as well as the one out, as they stood with hands on each other's shoulders, compa-

nions in adversity, and carefully withdrawn from the mother's view. Equally carefully smothered from the mother's ears was the whisper—

"Please, miss, we didna really fecht; only Jock, he wanted the cake quicker than I wished to gie it him."

"An' then," continued the other boy, "the cake got broke aboot, and mither took the birch till us. But please, leddy, we're starving, as ye say, an' we're sair needing the parritch, if only ye'd speak for us to mither."

"And you won't fight over the next thing you get, like a couple of herring over one worm?" asked Alice sedately.

"Nay, nay, then, we'll no fecht the nicht, nor the morn, nor the morn's morn," eagerly muttered red-headed young Jack, "if only ye'll beg mither to gie us our suppers."

"Well then," said the young lady slowly, as if she were somewhat reluctant to undertake the task. But her steps were not very lingering ones, as, after popping her face back in at the shanty door a moment with a mischievous smile, she betook herself across the yard to plead with Mrs. Menzies for the delinquents.

"Weel, weel," began Ailsa, after the first few words, in a yielding tone; but then it so happened that she turned back to her porridge-pot, and the yielding expression faded from her face.

"There, my lassie, there; gae back to your ain place. I tell ye it's nae gude beggin for the ladies, for I'm short o' meal the nicht, and sae I maun just keep to the no-forgiein them; for they'll no tak' kindly to the forgienness wi'oot the supper."

Such a reason for withholding pardon was certainly original; so delightfully so, Alice Terry thought, that in her secret mind she really considered that the boys ought to feel that it made amends to them for the threat of being sent hungry to bed. However, it furthered her plans.

"Never mind about the meal-tub's emptiness, Mrs. Menzies," she said, laughing. "We have supper for your two bad boys, if only you will let them have it."

"Aye, weel then, ye're a wilfu lassie, and I suppose ye must hae your way. Though they're nane really, to say, nane sae bad as ye put it neither, and where they're gane is more than I can tell ye."

"I'll find them," was the merry answer, as Miss Terry put her hands on the two boys' arms and led them to the tea-room, while the mother turned back to her simple cookery, with a smile of maternal gratification doing as much to light up her massive features as the glow of the ruddy fire.

Alice led her guests up to the tea-table, and

pointed out to them the dish to which Esmé took such great exception. Briefly to describe it now—tepid mutton ships, closely shut in by ice regions of fat, the whole toned down with a colouring of London fog. Very wholesome food, but not what “Punch” would have been inclined to put before that graceful invalid to whom a few years since his equally graceful doctor ordered—“Cream and curaçoa.”

However, it is a fortunate fact that “different people have different opinions—some like apples, and some like onions;” and whichever these rejected mutton cutlets might be called, whether the apples or the onions, when Alice Terry pointed them out to her companions James and Jack, the eyes of those two young Menzies glistened; and when she asked which they would rather have, the tepid mutton or some porridge, a hoarse, short laugh, and a significant rub of the hands towards the dish of meat, was considered a more than sufficient answer.

“Stop a moment. Take dish and all away with you, my friends, if you please,” said the Lady Bountiful the next moment, with a peal of laughter as much at Esmé’s face of disgust as at the boys. They had naturally each attempted, with eager fingers, to pull up a mutton ship out of its congealed sea, when the viands were actually presented to them. Not at all from any distaste to the sea

itself had they so acted, but from genuine modesty, not to deprive the generous owners of too much of their dainties.

"Be off with you," added Alice with a friendly push towards the door. "And if we have given you more supper than you can eat yourselves, you can let Donald and Davie have a share."

A wide-mouthed grin replied to that suggestion, as the two round-headed, lumbering laddies took themselves out again into the welcome obscurity of the yard, holding the dish between them. Donald and Davie were some years older than they were, and already steady-going young fishermen. There was very little chance of the meal running too low to provide their supper.

"And now for the cake," said Jeanie. "I am sure Alice, that, without any betting for it, Esmé will agree that you deserve the first and the largest slice."

"What for? For teaching our squeamish young Queenie a useful lesson? That is worth some reward certainly."

"No, for getting so generously rid of that hateful sight. But what is the useful lesson you have taught me, or claim to have taught me? How to make peace in a family, or that you have managed, as usual, to pick up all the names of the Menzies clan? Which of those two is the lesson?"

"Both," was the calm reply ; "you have reminded me of my just claims. But what I especially referred to, myself, was the judicious way in which I have taught you not to despise wholesome food."

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT JAMES AND JACK, NOT DONALD NOR DAVIE.

THE tea-things cleared away, a large, grey, scarlet-bordered shawl of Flora Campbell's thrown over the table by way of tablecloth, and the whole party devoting a quiet hour before going to bed to writing letters. Esmé had said very decidedly "I must," and as she was always the slowest of the four in preparing for her couch, none of the others felt it was of much use to attempt to indulge their sleepiness before her small majesty chose to do so. Besides, Alice's mother was quite as anxious for frequent news of her only child as the Wilsons were to hear how their beloved young daughter was faring in her adventurous tour. As for Flora and Jeanie, they were always glad to seize a few minutes' opportunity at any time, to add a few lines to their diary-like letters to the far-distant brother.

Scratch, scratch, scratch, went one pen—chit, chit, chit, went another—scribble, scribble, scribble, went a third. Only Flora Campbell's pen flowed on, like

her own sweet nature, so smoothly that it jarred no nerves, irritated no feelings, made so little noise that it might have been supposed idle altogether, while its work ceased not, and was all well done.

Scribble, scribble, scribble, went Miss Terry's pen, just as fast as ever her pen could be moved by the hasty fingers that wielded it. Such a letter! Here a little sketch, there a long dash intended to convey silent meaning. Then a whole pile of adjectives. A little farther on the word "Gasp" written, and following it, between hyphens—"That signifies how I felt when I first gazed down into the depths of that purple-blue mist. But oh! Mums dear, the gasp is coming up again into my throat as I think of it, so I must just leave telling you any more about it until I can do so with my head on your knee beside your own little fire, one evening next winter.

"And now, if you only knew how tired I am, I know quite well that you would say, 'My own dear Totty, you really must go to bed;' so, like an obedient child, your own Totty, dear, darling Mums, will do it. Good-night!"

Then another small drawing of the Menzies boys over the dish of mutton, a second of a nightcap and a candlestick. Then a yawn, and then, in a half whisper—

"Hark, Jeanie! what was that?"

Jeanie also had laid down her pen and was listening.

"I am sure I don't know, Alice. I was just wondering too when you spoke. I suppose they don't have burglars ever in these parts?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Esmé, with a stifled cry of terror at the suggestion, and turning very white.

Flora looked up from her writing with a smile. "Foolish children, all of you! Of course it is only some of the Menzies' trying to drive a stray chicken or two into the fowl-house."

This explanation might have been more satisfactory if any of the usual sounds and calls, proper to that employment, had been heard. But the only sounds were a subdued murmur and a sort of scuffling, persistently kept up close outside their door. Suddenly a gleam of light shone on Alice's perplexed countenance, and she sprang up.

"I have it!" she exclaimed, with a laugh of mingled amusement and vexation.

"Have what?" asked Esmé, reviving with her companion's more cheerful aspect. "Have a burglar, do you mean?"

"No; but a clue to the meaning of these sounds outside. It is those Menzies boys, no doubt, but not driving chickens, as Flora thinks. Depend upon it they are quarrelling again. They want to be made to climb up Goatfell every day. There is too much unused energy in their compositions."

And with that short theory on quarrelsomeness Miss Terry ran across the room, and drawing back the bolt, threw open the door into the court.

"Oh!" came two short, sharp ejaculations as a stream of light from the lamp fell suddenly across the outer darkness.

"Oh, indeed," repeated Miss Alice Terry energetically, turning towards the spot whence the sounds proceeded out of profound obscurity against the wall, two or three feet from the door. "I should just think that it is 'oh!' you tiresome fellows. I am ashamed of you both to come disturbing us like this at such an hour."

"Very sorry," came a low mutter.

"Very sorry indeed!" repeated the young lady again, still more vigorously as she proceeded in her reproofs. "And so you ought to be very sorry. I begin to reckon that you don't deserve forgiveness. I suppose this time you have broken the dish."

"Oh no!" quickly; "we nearly smashed the window out, but we haven't broken a dish."

This reply was given in a curiously choked voice; but whether choked with contrite emotion, or with laughter, the hearers in the shanty apartment had a moment of perplexed wonder. They had, however, only time for a moment's doubt or thought of that especial wonder at all, for the next instant there was a startled, almost, it seemed, a terrified cry from their companion at the door, and she retreated a step



"Oh!" came two sharp, short ejaculations, as a stream of light from the lamp fell suddenly across the outer darkness.—Page 140.

or two backwards at the same time. Hitherto she had been looking downwards for two white patches in the way of faces in the general darkness, but now, as that denial about the dish was given, she raised her eyes for the first time, and, tall as she was herself, those two white patches were above her. No wonder a cry escaped her and she retreated.

"Why," she said, after a few moments' pause, but still with somewhat bewildered wits, "you are not James and Jack at all."

"No," came the solemn reply; "and if James and Jack have broken a dish, I am very glad we are not."

"And you are not Donald and Davie either," said Miss Terry again, courageously keeping her ground, and striving to regain self-possession in spite of a tiny tinkle of silver laughter audible behind her.

But that silvery tinkle had more visible effect upon the owners of those dimly seen two white patches, who forthwith stepped forward to the entrance and brought the white patches, or rather two particularly frank, good-looking faces, into the full beam of the light.

"No, and we are not Don"—— began the second of the strangers in answer to Alice's second declaration. And then, his eyes grown accustomed to the brightness he was looking in upon, he exclaimed, breaking off his answer, "Oh, how jolly!"

He was not above nineteen or twenty years of age evidently, so his impulsive, openly expressed admiration might be excused. Alice's embarrassment and surprise all faded away into smiles as she turned for a moment, and looked back into the room to which she and her companions had contrived to give such a comfortably home-like aspect during their two days' occupancy.

"Yes," she said, turning round again to the strangers, "it certainly does look more inviting than it did when we first saw it two nights ago. But I do pity you, if you are in the same shelterless condition that we were then, for we certainly are not inclined to turn out, and I much fear lodgings are more than scarce hereabouts."

"Yes, we have noticed that as we came along," said the elder of the two young tourists. "But, happily for us, we are independent so far as a sleeping-place is concerned. We carry a tent with us, and have already put it up in a field at the back of this place. But we have no provisions with us, and, when I was in these parts last year sketching, I used to get my supplies from the worthy people living here. At least, living one side of this court, I could not remember which, for sometimes the landlady came to me from one door, sometimes from the other; and the sounds you heard outside, and which I fear fright"—

Here the speaker stopped suddenly and bit his

lip. He had just remembered that the young lady had not — decidedly had not — appeared alarmed when she threw the door back, and spoke into the darkness with a very authoritative tone.

"No," calmly remarked Miss Terry, taking up the interrupted speech. "I was not particularly frightened, thank you. Surprised perhaps."

"You know now, though," said the younger of the strangers with eager apology, "that we were only engaged in efforts to find the door in the darkness."

"Yes, yes," was the smiling reply. "And now, if you like, I will run across and tell Mrs. Menzies that you are here."

"But the whole place yonder is in darkness. They must have gone to bed, I am afraid," was the doubtful and disconsolate reply.

However, Miss Terry did not entertain the same opinion. She knew of a fancy the Menzies family had for crowding together in a little back den, when the fire was done with for the night.

"At any rate, it will do no harm to make sure," she said with another friendly smile, as she went over to the other side on her benevolent errand, which was not exactly undertaken with a view to saving the young men trouble. She remembered the poverty of the Menzies land two nights ago, and the scant fare they would have had to put up with had not generosity come to their aid, and

she was minded that she and her friends, in their turn, should enjoy the privilege of benefiting others in a similar plight.

It was well that her power and will were so disposed, or the two artists must have supped upon their paints and sketching-boards, if they had indulged in supper at all. Alice found Mrs. Menzies, as she had expected, packed into a sort of enlarged sentry-box with her family, and at once stated the purpose of her visit. It was received with blank dismay.

"Hech, then!" exclaimed Ailsa Menzies, struggling up to her feet with some difficulty, and not executing the manœuvre without a squeal from Jack as he shook his trodden-on fingers, and a squeak from Jamie as he rubbed his trodden-on toes. "Hech, then, lassie!" she exclaimed again when she was fairly up. "Do I ken wha it may be, they yonder, do ye ask? Weel's weel then, to be sure, I reckon. At ony rate, the t'ane o' them if no the tither, an' he's as douce an' weel-liking a laddie as ere trod shoe-leather. But wae's me, lassie, what's to dae for him now?"

"Give him something to eat as quickly as you can," was the laughing answer.

"Aye," almost groaned the true-hearted Scotch-woman, "that's sune said, but lang to dae. Has it passed your memory, lassie, how I telt ye that I would na forgie Jack and Jamie, seeing it was weel

for me, scant o' meal as I was, that they suld ha' to forego suppers the night? And then ye come clamourin that I'd gie the gentlemen something to eat! I've naething at all before the morn, forby a last-week's scone and potato-peelings for the chickens; the like o' which I ae day saw a starving tramp munch up before my e'en. But I doubt thae young artist bodies wouldna dae that."

"I hope not, poor things!" murmured Alice with a sigh for the starving tramp. Then she went up nearer to Mrs. Menzies, and said in low tones and rather quickly, "Let them have the scone by all means, please, and one of our chickens that came in that basket. Give it them from yourself, please. Don't say anything about us."

And with that hasty request Miss Terry ran back along the passage out into the yard, told the strangers quickly, "You will find Mrs. Menzies in there," bade them good-night, and flew back to the shanty and her companions.

"And did they break the dish?" asked Esmé, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"If they did, you shall sweep up the pieces in the morning," was the reply.

"And in the meantime," said Jeanie with a very sleepy yawn, "I should think that she had better go to bed at once, that she may get strength for the task."

"Resolution put and carried," said Alice, as she

went into the inner room and lighted a candle there for Flora and Esmé, who lost little time in putting up their writing-cases and following her.

Esmé was too tired even to hunt on the floor for spiders that night, or to search through the bed-curtains for earwigs!

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE WAY OUT OF A DILEMMA.

" BUT I tell you I can't."

" And I tell you you must."

Alice Terry tried hard to make her voice sound very stern, but there was a much more unmistakable ring in it of half-anxious pleading, and there was a rather frightened look in her eyes besides.

The picture was pretty enough presented by the two speakers, only, unfortunately, there were no eyes to see it but those of wild birds, bees, and such-like despisers of human beings. Flora and her sister had gone forward. They had got into a long, quiet talk together about their brother, and for once found each other's company too absorbingly interesting to notice that they had strayed on, leaving their companions far behind and out of sight. And a brawling, sparkling, tumbling burn had proved so tempting to the two loiterers that, instead of following on after their leaders, as in duty bound, they had turned aside up the burn, until at last Esmé managed to perch herself on a small, round, slippery bit of rock in the

middle of rather deep water, and solemnly declared that she must live and die on it, as she could not get away from it, either up or down.

"However, then, did you get on to it?" called Alice.

"I don't know," came the half-sobbing answer. "But you must know that it is much easier to get into a muddle than it is to get out of it again; and I do think that you might help me instead of laughing at me."

"Poor little Queenie! so I might," said Alice, meekly accepting the reproof, and bounding downwards to the rescue. But when she got within about a couple of yards or so of the prisoner, her progress was brought to a standstill. Without getting wet through, almost up to her waist, she did not see how she could reach Esmé, nor, if she did reach her, how she could do anything more than encourage her by example to slip off her perch and wade to the heathery bank. Even that sacrifice to friendship she was willing to make if it was absolutely necessary, but even to Alice it did seem a rather superfluous idea to imitate a drowned rat because some one else must do so.

She scrambled up to the bank from her own stepping-stones, and sat down for a minute's contemplation of the state of affairs. She shook her head; Esmé shook hers. She looked at Esmé with a puzzled expression, and Esmé looked at her with a doleful one.

"Do think of something, Alice. I can't stand here much longer. I'm getting quite giddy with this horrid tumbling water, and my feet seem beginning to slip. What shall I do?"

"Jump off and come to me," said Alice, getting down off the bank again on to one of the stones in the burn, and stretching her hands upwards towards Esmé to encourage her. But in vain.

"I can't," said Esmé, gazing down into the foaming pool with its strong bed. "I shall break my legs, and sprain my ankles, and hurt my back, and ruin my cape, and I can't."

"I guess I'd like to say, 'Bother your cape,'" muttered a worried young damsel, as she again mounted to the bank to study possibilities.

"I tell you what it is, Esmé," she said at last, resolutely, "we shall be losing the others altogether if we don't take care. We must be getting on. If you won't brave the dangers of that little puddle, you must just manage to spring back on to the bank as cleverly as you sprang off it. Come along!"

"But I tell you I can't," sobbed Esmé, shivering.

"And I tell you you must," retorted Alice, at the same time watching a pair of tottering feet with some anxiety.

If Esmé persisted in stopping on the stone till she fell off it, there was considerable probability that she would meet with some of her expected

misfortunes. That tiresome sacrifice to friendship must be made.

Alice sat down and pulled off her boots. At least, she pulled off one boot, and then—an awful sound behind her, a wild scream before her; Esmé sprang up into the air as if she had been shot, and went souse into the pool with a leap. Alice started to her feet, gave one look behind, and followed her.

As she disappeared from the bank a second furious, and prolonged bellow proclaimed the enemy's wrathful disappointment. The two girls, with some stumbling and many bruises, reached each other, and stood for some quaking moments staring into each other's faces, speechless.

"Couldn't we climb a tree, Alice? The bull could not follow us there," gasped Esmé.

"If you'll find one to climb," was the rather short reply, for the rushing feet of the bull coming towards the burn were distinctly audible, and even the firm, brave heart of Alice Terry felt chill.

It is all very well to talk about being brave; it is very well to be brave; but when a vital peril is upon you with which you are, of yourself, utterly unable to cope, then comes some quivering pause between losing hold of the useless bravery of action, and catching hold of that of resignation. As the two girls' wet hands clasped each other, that pause had come to Alice. Intense terror made Esmé

blindly eager to be doing something for safety's sake; the unwonted sense of helplessness filled Alice with a curious feeling, for a few moments, of cold indifference. When that numbness quivered back into a strong yearning to keep her fresh, bright life, she caught sight of the great black beast's flaming eyes and gigantic horns plunging along within a few yards of them. Alice shuddered almost as violently as poor little Esmé. She clutched her friend's hand tighter.

"Come Esmé, come up the burn," she muttered breathlessly, as the bull came scrambling, stumbling, crashing down from the bank, but twenty or thirty feet below them.

And she pulled her through the water and over the stones to a point narrower than any of the rest of the watercourse. So narrow just at one spot that they could not both pass on together. Alice hurriedly pushed on Esmé past that spot and then followed herself.

The bull followed too, but not past that point. It got wedged there, and stood for some seconds with its head down, bellowing with mad fury, and tearing at the ground. At last, with a frantic effort, it forced itself backwards, free once more. But so also, free and uninjured, stood the intended victims of its senseless rage. Again it plunged forward, again got caught between the rocks, and stood giving vent to its furious threats, and again

it got free. This time its plunges brought down some earth and stones, and the narrow point was wider. Esmé hid her eyes against her companion's shoulder.

"Alice!" she whispered, "O Alice! must we stay here to be tossed and gored? This horror of waiting for it is more than I can bear."

It began to be well-nigh more than Alice could bear either. But whether their present state was bearable or whether it was not, it was unchangeable as far as their power was concerned. Further progress up the burn was impossible, and to mount on to the bank on either side would have only been to place themselves still more immediately at the mercy of their antagonist.

On came the bull again, more at its ease this time. It appeared to have discovered that, under present circumstances, its ultimate success was only a matter of patience, and it accepted the situation accordingly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REWARD OF TRUST.

"ALICE! O Alice! can't we drown instead?" moaned Esmé, gazing back at the pool she had so lately feared.

Alice answered her slowly, "Hush, Esmé! I have been thinking that; but it is a coward thought. What God sends must be best; and we do not yet know if He means to send us death or harm."

Alice had been going to say "death or suffering," but the feeling of present suffering was too real. That, at least, was sent them, and the other seemed truly more than likely to follow.

The bull came splashing through the water over the pebbles leisurely enough, till it reached the obstructing spot, then down went its head, and with a dash it made its horns into a battering-ram, and brought down a shower of ruins, to the accompaniment of another terrified shriek from Esmé. The bull evidenced its satisfaction at its performance by retreating a step or two and giving vent to a reverberating triumphant bellow.

The next instant Alice flung her arm around Esmé and pulled her with her half-way up the bank.

"Hark!" she exclaimed, "hark, Esmé! there is help—do you hear?"

Esmé's fear-numbered ears had then heard nothing but the bull's roarings, but she heard something now—a glorious chorus of barking dogs. The bull heard, too, and shook its head with lordly displeasure.

Alice's strong lungs exerted themselves in a mighty cry; Esmé's shriller tones came in as echo. They were answered by more energetic and eager barking, and a human shout, and almost the next moment, pell-mell, helter-skelter, came three splendid collies, right over the heads of the girls, with a leap into the burn, facing the baffled black monster.

Esmé clasped her companion tight. "O Alice! you were right. I'm glad I'm not drowned."

A little hysterical laugh broke from Alice's lips, although her words rang firmly enough and with the right sound.

"So am I, Queenie. I expect people always do find reason to be glad when they trust themselves to God's love. Peter only began to sink when he doubted."

Meantime the bull was being rewarded for its late misdeeds with a somewhat throttling rope about

its neck, and was being ignominiously dragged backwards out of the burn, the three dogs doing their master good service in the business.

"But surely it's very dangerous," said Alice to the herdsman shepherd, "to let such savage creatures roam loose about a country that unsuspecting people are always walking over."

The young lady intended her question as a grave rebuke, but it passed as harmlessly over the head of her hearer as water off a duck's back.

"Hey then," he answered calmly, "it does seem a bit dangerous, nae doubt. But it is no, so to say, often that we let them out aboot like this, an' somehow there never is a mishap, beyond a bit o' fearsomeness like this now, to a lassie or so, maybe. I ha' never heard tell of a real mischance this twenty years gone. Ye'd ha' been the first in my time, if ye'd come to harm."

"And right-down disappointed you are," muttered Esmé indignantly, "that we haven't, so that you might have had this nice little adventure as a relief to monotony."

It really did almost seem so to both the excited girls, but they forgot that their stolid friend had not been standing for a horrible ten minutes, like a victim in an ancient amphitheatre, waiting to be tossed and gored.

"I only wish I could just make you feel, just for one good long half-hour, what it is to be afraid

of cows and mad bulls!" muttered Esmé again, with an angry shake of the golden head.

"You vindictive little thing!" said Alice, laughing, "I am ashamed of you."

Esmé was ashamed of herself not long after, and duly penitent, for their calm-tempered friend in need did not content himself with rescuing them from the bull, but when he became fully aware of their drenched and deplorable condition, he sent them to his home amongst the hills, under the guidance of one of his clever collies, to whom the word "home" was quite enough command, and there his wife dried their garments, and regaled them with piled-up bowls of steaming potatoes and sweet-milk.

The shepherd also found Flora and Jeanie for them, and could scarcely be made to accept any payment when he crowned his day's kind deeds by showing the tired party a near way home.

"How kind every one is!" sighed Esmé, "and what an adventure we've had!"

CHAPTER XVI

A READY RECKONER.

"SEVEN twos are fourteen—are—four—teen."

"Really Alice, my friend, you frighten me," said Miss Esmé Wilson earnestly; so earnestly, indeed, that Miss Terry lifted her head from her hands quickly, and said in an abstracted tone—

"Four—t— I beg your pardon; I mean, what did you say, Esmé? Were you speaking to me?"

"Yes, my unfortunate friend, I was," was the solemn reply. "I wish to tell you that I really tremble for your brain if you pursue such severe studies. Up to twice six or six times two are twelve; but when it comes to seven twos!"

"And in the holidays, too," added Jeanie, "and during breakfast! Fancy spoiling the pleasantest meal of the day with lessons!"

"Tea was the pleasantest meal of the day, according to you, yesterday, Pussie," said the elder sister laughing.

"And a picnic midday dinner was her pleasantest

meal the day before," laughed Esmé. "Which will it be to-morrow, Jennie?"

"Whichever she gets the most hunger-sauce with," interposed the sharp-witted Alice, once more awake to the conversation around her. "So I make the friendly proposition that we keep her without food a few hours longer than usual to ensure her happiness. But now to return to our muttuns."

"Those of yesterday, or those of the night before, which you bestowed upon James and Jack?"

"Esmé, it grieves me to have to say it, but I am seriously afraid that I shall have to dedicate to you my poem upon 'The Chatterbox.'"

"Please do. And to return the compliment, I'll dedicate to you my ode upon 'The worn-out brain.' Twice seven are"—

"If you please, if you must quote me, whatever you do, be accurate. I said, not 'twice seven,' but 'seven twos.' A distinction *with* a difference. Flora, while I was making the porridge an hour ago, for myself and my three sleepy-headed, lie-a-bed friends, I asked Mrs. Menzies to make me out a little bill of what our expenses are a-day while we stay here. I did it because of what you said yesterday, while we were lying on the beach after our bathe."

"About that we were taking things rather easily, do you mean," broke in Jeanie, "and having made

no agreement as to what we were to pay when we came here?"

"Yes, Incoherence," began Alice, to be somewhat interrupted by a soft whisper, "And she was nothing if she was not critical."

But she contrived to treat the comment with the dignified indifference it merited, and to continue, "And as, for my part, taking matters of this sort rather easily signifies, for my practical temperament, feeling more or less uneasy, I resolved this morning to put my mind at rest without further delay by learning the worst at once, and there it is," handing the small scrap of paper over which she had been poring, across to Flora Campbell as she spoke.

Jeanie turned to her sister. "Shall we have to make acquaintance with the interior depths of the Heart of Midlothian, Flora, yet awhile?"

"Can't," from the quick young Yankee. "Your Midlothian has lost its heart."

"A good thing too, perhaps," said Flora with a smile, "since it was something of a cruel one. But what does this elegant little atom of paper, with these hieroglyphics, mean? Are these pen-and-ink scratches words, and can you read them?"

"They are words," was the sedate reply, "and I can read them now, although I may as well confess, for Esmé's relief, that even my superlative genius did not reach that height until the writer

of the cabalistic signs had also deciphered them. When I asked for a bill, Mrs. Menzies, with friendly promptitude, tore that corner-shaped sheet of paper off a bacon wrapper, and at once made out her claim against us for one day, as I had asked. And, as she remarked approvingly, 'That was really all that was needed, for one day was like all the other days, like boys; and when we'd made out to know about one, we'd nought to do but to reckon up the others.' "

Esmé put down her teacup. "What others—boys or bills?"

"She did not say, so you are free to take your choice. My choice fell upon bills—'seven twos are fourteen.' Clever of me to manage that sum, but after all the bill is agreeably simple. No complications, so to say."

And Alice Terry rose from her seat, and going round the table she leant over Flora and read out the bill—

"Rume, coucken an tenden, 2 shellen."

"Oh! how delightful!" exclaimed Esmé Wilson, clapping her hands.

Jeanie expressed her satisfaction in her usual way with a joyous peal of laughter, in which Alice Terry joined, with the greater heartiness for the somewhat irksome restraint of gravity she had put upon herself during the past ten minutes. Flora Campbell looked almost as pleased as her com-

panions, although she showed her contentment in a more tranquil manner, and although, from her memory of former visits, she had not expected a very formidable account to be presented by an Arranite to a party of which two of the members were her own countrywomen, and the other two had won themselves her especial favour.

"But still there is that room of Mr. Robertson's which we have had," said Flora. "We really ought to try to pay something for that."

"Yes," agreed Alice. "But yet I am quite sure that we shall not be able. You see, Mr. Robertson, when you spoke to him about it, said that he was only too glad to know that his books were being so well guarded. And you should have seen Mrs. Menzies' face when I proposed to her that she should be paid twice over for the same place. She went into a perfect rage about my wishing to teach her dishonesty. I almost thought for one minute that she would forget I was neither Jamie nor Jock, and give me a 'clout on the side o' the heid.' What do you think she said at last?"

"That you should go without supper to-night?"

"No, not that."

"Well then, tell us," said that lazy little Esmé. "It's too early in the day for riddles, and I never guess them even in the evening. What did she threaten you with?"

"Why, that if I said any more she would just alter her tune, and, instead of charging little, put upon us the rent of the whole place. And she looked quite capable of doing it too, I can assure you."

"And so she was," said Flora quietly. "That is the Scotch character. To treat you very generously, or, if you won't have that, to draw every penny from you it is possible to get. What did you have to pay that woman up the glen yesterday, Esmé, for that bowl of milk?"

"A good deal more than enough," said Esmé, laughing. "She was so fine with her 'Nothing, nothing,' at first, and then, when I insisted on paying, she charged me sixpence for what was worth a penny."

"Just so! If you had accepted the gift, she would have had the pleasure of her hospitality; if not, she chose to have the pleasure of a decided gain."

"Then," whispered Esmé, laying her cheek against her friend's, "I suppose if we can once teach our Scotch Flora to be one little mite less unselfish, she will learn to be altogether selfish. We must exercise our ingenuity to make the experiment."

Flora's gentle face flushed. "Oh, hush, Esmé dear!" she murmured back with trembling lips. "Do not wish to make me worse than I am. I

have so many faults, and you are all trying your best to make me so vain and proud, that you will not be able to stay with me."

"I don't think that we ought, as it is," returned the younger girl, with her cheek still resting against her companion's face. "Your life, during the past ten days, has been one perpetual round, as it used to be at school, of giving up to one or other of us. Have you ever a wish or a will of your own?"

"Very often," said Miss Campbell, raising her head now, and turning a smiling countenance to her friend. "For wishes, I wish you all to go on loving me as you do now, and I very heartily wish that we may all return to our homes, at the end of our tour, safe in life, limbs, and brains."

"Yes, well," assented Miss Esmé, with an answering smile. "For the wishes, if you call those wishes, I suppose you have wishes. But how about the will?"

The mischievous dimples on the childlike face smoothed themselves out at sight of the gathering expression of tender gravity before her, as the low-voiced reply came, "And for the will, dearest Esmé, thanks to the trusting love you all bear to me, I find the will very useful in guiding the movements of the present party where there is any real need for doing so, and in keeping within bounds the occasionally rather wild high spirits,

that I regard as a compliment to my own bonnie Highland air."

There was a short pause, and then Esmé murmured quietly, "Yes, it is quite true; your influence goes through everything, although it needs thought to find it out. You never domineer or dictate, and you seem to interfere so little. You are the sort of aunt that Budge and Toddy would have liked. You would never have let them get veal-pie and pickles for breakfast, but you would have kissed or loved them into thinking their bread and milk the very food they had chosen above all else. I wish I were like you, Flora."

"And I am the Rocky Mountains high glad you are not," exclaimed Alice Terry, coming back from the inner room, where she and Jeanie had been making the bed. "I am sure our artist friends were taking a sketch of us while we were eating our luncheon up the glen yesterday; and, as you two were sitting together, the different-coloured complexions and black and gold hair will make a splendid contrast."

"But, Alice," remonstrated Flora, looking shy and troubled, "if you saw they were sketching us, why did you not let us know?"

"I daresay," returned that young lady, "and have the satisfaction of seeing you all get up and walk off, for my pains. Do you think that is the way I'd take the bread out of the poor laddies'

mouths one day, after robbing you all, the night before, to put a bit in? Hech! no. It's nane Alice Terry is the woman to be thrained to do that same."

"Alice! how can you talk such polyglot gibberish?" exclaimed Esmé, laughing. "I really wonder sometimes how you can possibly remember to speak properly to the little Elmslies."

"So do I," was the meditative reply. "But you see I suppose it's the gift of language I possess. Some are gifted in one way and some in another; my speciality is language, I guess. And that reminds me, Esmé. I am sorry to disappoint you, but I reckon that I'll have, after all, to dedicate that poem of mine on 'The Chatterbox' to myself. I picked a learned-looking old book out of Mr. Robertson's shelves just now, and the first line I read was, 'Speech is the distinguishing mark of the higher from the lower animals.' From henceforth all my efforts must be directed to the cultivation of speech."

"Would it not be a grander achievement for you to learn a little silence first?" asked Esmé, while even Flora put up her hands over her ears, and Jeanie begged that Miss Terry's previous efforts of genius might be directed towards the invention of second pairs of ears for them.

"Some of the lower animals," began Alice, "have"——

"What! Two pairs of ears?" interrupted Jeanie.

"No; but one pair of nice long ones. Just let me look under your curls, and see what kind you have got."

"And meantime," said Esmé with a dignified air, "suppose, Flora, you and I go out, and leave those two babies to themselves."

Miss Esmé Wilson looked rather the most like a baby of the party the next moment, as she was lifted up and tossed on to the bed, to the disarrangement of the golden wavy braids, and the heightening of the colour in the pearly-pink cheeks.

"My own dear little Esmé, will you pout when you are eighty, do you think?" asked Alice, laughing.

"Eighty!" came the murmured reply; "shall I live so long?"

And the laughter died away with a kiss.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. WILSON TO THE RESCUE.

THE inexpensiveness of their present place of sojourn made the Campbells, and Alice Terry, feel quite justified in adding another week to the proposed time of their trip. Of course Esmé Wilson was free to stay as long as her friends could stay with her, if she continued well and happy. Equally of course, the extra week was to be spent under the Menzies' roof, for whose genial friendliness Esmé made many little returns in the way of sundry neckties from her stores when the steamer brought her boxes, a warm woollen scarf for the old fisherman, and several other trifles, the more highly esteemed for having "come a' the way frae Lunnon."

The afternoon of their decision a good many other things of a welcome description came all the way from London, for the young ladies themselves.

What Jeanie Campbell called a dawdling day sandwiched the more exciting days of vigorous

expeditions. A late breakfast, bathing, looking over photographs in a walking-stick shop, and Alice's abstruse calculations as to seven twos making fourteen, had been pretty nearly all the four young ladies had accomplished, when, shortly before two o'clock, they saw a Glasgow steamer rounding the point.

"Let us see our friends disembark," exclaimed that startling Alice, jumping up with her upside-down book in one hand and her unopened sunshade in the other, and beginning to scamper along towards the pier as if she were in the greatest haste to prevent expected arrivals from thinking her neglectful of them.

The other three girls stared at each other in amazement. "What do you mean, Alice? Who are you expecting?" called Esmé after her.

"Wait for me!" shouted Jeanie, scrambling up her possessions with such eager hands that she dropped as much as she picked up, and ended by leaving her ball of worsted on the sand to get into an almost hopeless tangle about Esmé's feet.

"Never mind, dear," said Flora, who had also risen on the impulse of the sudden excitement. She knelt down again now, and busied herself in freeing her friend from the wool.

"You will be at liberty directly," she added cheerfully, as she worked away patiently at the entanglement.

Esmé herself did nothing on her own behalf. She sat where she had stumbled down again, and looked on, dolefully regretting the delay in catching that aggravating Alice, and making her tell them who it was that she could be expecting.

"It must be her mother, if she is really expecting any one," said Flora. "No one else is in the least likely to be coming here after her, I am sure."

"But she said 'our friends,'" remonstrated Esmé. "One person cannot be spoken of as friends. And I don't believe it can be Mrs. Terry either; surely Alice would have told us before this if she hoped to see her mother."

"If she hoped to see any one she knew besides ourselves, I expect," rejoined Flora, laughing, and helping Esmé up from the ground. "My belief is, that she was tired of sitting still, and spoke of our friends in a large sense, what she herself would call 'a man and a brother' sense. But come along. We shall soon see if she does meet any 'friends' with whom she can venture to shake hands, or whose names she can introduce to us."

Meantime the steamer reached the landing-stage before even Alice and Jeanie got there, in spite of their haste.

"It's nae guid, leddies," said a good-natured old man, removing his pipe from his mouth to speak to them, as their running feet came up to him where he sat mending his nets. He looked so sympathetic

as he uttered his kindly warning, that Alice stood a moment, and asked smiling—

“What is no good?”

“Why, you tryin to catch yon. Thae boats is like time an’ tide, aye, an’ mony another thing in natur—they wait for naebody. There’s the partin whistle, leddy, amaisht afore the comin bell has done ringin, an’ I’m sorry for ye; but never mind—there’ll be anither ane by soon. An’ there’ll be more to-morrow.”

“Thank you,” smiled Alice merrily. “So there will. Good-day to you.”

And then the two girls ran on again, gaining the pier as the people came streaming off, hustled and jostled somewhat unceremoniously by the men bringing over the luggage, which was carried to one or other of the carts awaiting it, or to the large yellow waggonette already filled with people.

“If Alice did expect any particular friends, you see that they have not come,” observed Flora smiling, as she and Esmé lingered somewhat apart from the small bustle and hurry, and at a little distance from their companions, who had advanced close to the end of the small pier to get all the amusement they could out of the scene.

Suddenly they saw Alice turn eagerly to look after a man who had just passed her, laden like his companions. Jeanie evidently shared their surprise

when Alice left her side and ran after the porter. But Miss Terry knew what she was about.

She got up with the man just as he reached the steamer's small waiting-shed, ticket-office, or whatever it calls itself, and there he dropped his burden with a thud on the ground, as he growled to some one inside——

"Say then, what wull I do wi' this? Leave it here or carry't on?"

"Neither, but give it to me," said a clear, bright voice behind him that made the man start, and accordingly made him also angry.

"An' what wull I gie it to ye for, I'd like to ken?" he demanded surlily. "It's mony beside ye as wad like to ha' the gear as belongs to ithers. I'll gie that to them it belongs to an' nane ither, if I dinna leave it here."

"Very well," was the laughing answer, and Alice turned round and called——

"Esmé, come here and claim our friends, please. This man won't let me have anything to do with them, but I hope you will. Be quick; I do so want to see what they are like."

Esmé, Jeanie, and Flora all hastened forward now to where Alice and the Scotchman stood keeping joint guard over a huge hamper.

"There!" exclaimed Alice with smiling triumph. "Did I not do well in hastening forward to meet our friends?"

The glad colour mounted into Esmé's cheeks as she saw her own name on the hamper in a very well-known handwriting.

"How good! how very good of mamma!" she said joyously. "Fancy her thinking of doing this, and so quickly too!"

"I suppose you told her of our destitute condition on arriving here four days ago," said Flora, smiling. "No doubt she has been troubled with a dismal vision ever since, of four emaciated creatures creeping about on a desolate shore, and maintaining a precarious existence on shrimps and"——

"Whilks and octopuses," put in Jeanie.

"Both of which you have named erroneously, permit me to remark in passing," put in Alice. "Meantime, Esmé my dear, won't it be nice finding out what is in that basket? Shall I carry it to the shanty for you? It's pretty heavy, I daresay. Indeed, it is sure to be, since your mamma has sent it. But still"——

"But still, do you always talk nonsense, Miss Alice Terry?" half whispered Esmé, with the happy light still shining in her eyes. "I daresay we can get this man to take it up to Mrs. Menzies' for us. Won't you?" she added aloud, turning to the man who stood with his foot on the hamper, as though he were not quite sure that those young ladies might not there and then pick it up and run

off with the property in spite of him. He raised his eyes to the pink and white face of his questioner; his own grew a trifle more friendly-looking at the sight, and he growled out—

“What may ye be wantin wi’ me? If it’s to gie ye that basket, I tell ye at startin, for sure and certain, I canna and I winna, for I maunna. It’s no mine to gie.”

Esmé and Jeanie looked puzzled as they listened to the man’s speech. Of course, it was reasonable enough so far. Any one might come forward and claim it, and how could he tell which person had a right to do so? Alice looked annoyed and impatient, and muttered under her breath something that sounded very much like, “Great impudent stupid!”

In this emergency Flora stepped forward with her quiet manner and gentle face, and having first stooped to read the direction on the hamper, she said pleasantly to its guardian, “This is directed to Goatfell Cottage, Duncan Menzies, I see. Ought it not to be delivered there for the lady it is addressed to?”

The man lifted his Glengarry, and rubbed up his red hair on end while he considered that proposition. “Would you be thinkin that Ailsa Menzies, or the leddy as is to get it, would pay ony ane wha carried it up yonder?”

Esmé opened her rosy lips eagerly with returning

hope, but Flora put up her hand to her gently as she answered, "Yes, I can promise that. Whoever takes it up at once will earn a shilling, and hearty thanks besides for his kindness."

Without another word the man picked up his load again, turned it over his shoulder and marched, giving the girls a little more than enough to do to keep up with him. When he reached the Menzies' place only two of the party were beside him, and even Alice had barely breath enough left to exclaim to the Scotchwoman who came to meet them—

"Give him a good talking to, Mrs. Menzies. He has been taking me for a thief!"

"Hech! an' what is it ye say?" cried Mrs. Menzies, turning upon the unfortunate porter as if she were quite ready to reward his stern integrity with something worse than angry speeches.

Alice was half-frightened at the effect of her words. She did not know the full extent of what her Scotch landlady considered to be due from her to those under her roof. She was so very forward to fight their battles for them, that the young lady had to change her tone.

"Stay, Mrs. Menzies," she added quickly, stepping up to her. "Perhaps you had better not be too angry with him, after all, for I suppose he only acted as he thought right. That hamper that he is carrying is for us, you see—at least for one of

us—and he would not let me have it. That is all.”

“And enough all, too, the impudent lad!” ejaculated Ailsa, as she snatched the hamper out of its bearer’s arms and carried it into her lodgers’ room, and then stood in the doorway glowering at her countryman, with mischievous-eyed Alice keeping guard between the two till Esmé and the Campbells should come up.

Mrs. Menzies had no wish that the object of her resentment should remain so long in her sight, however, and finding he made no attempt to take himself off, she took a stride forward at last as though to show him the way out of her yard after a fashion of her own. Alice found it needful to speak again. She had kindled the fire half in fun, half in girlish resentment at the man’s want of trust in her, and now she found herself obliged to put her pride in her pocket, and take all the blame of the affair upon herself, and give all manner of praise to the object of her indignation for his sturdy uprightness.

“And you won’t be having a family feud, to hand down for the next twenty generations, I hope,” she ended as her friends came up in time to be as mystified by the hope as those to whom it was especially addressed.

“Well,” she said sedately, in reply to Jeanie’s questions, when the man had gone off with his

shilling, and Ailsa Menzies had gone off to clout Jamie's head, by way of relieving the mystification of her own,—“Well, Jeanie, you know in Walter Scott's novels, and in all books about Scotland, one reads of the unending Scotch feuds. Just suppose Mrs. Menzies had struck that man. She seemed quite up to doing it; then he would have felt bound to strike her eldest son, and her eldest son would have been bound to strike his eldest son, and his eldest son would have been bound to strike her—her—— Would there have been a her to come in here? I really cannot remember. I must just begin all over again, I guess, to put the matter straight before you.”

“And I guess that it's just you that will get struck if you do,” exclaimed Esmé, springing up and clasping her small white hands over the Yankee mouth. “Really, Alice, I begin to think that Scotch air must have the effect of making some bodies daft. I am getting sadly alarmed about you.”

“So am I about myself,” was the pathetic agreement, with a sudden toss up of the tall head to set it free from the clasping fingers. “It is actually past two o'clock, and I have had nothing to eat since half-past nine. Esmé, do you mind ‘guessing,’ for once, though you are unhappily not a member of the one free and enlightened republic? I wish you would.”

"Willingly! What am I to guess?"

"Why, whether there is cake or a woollen shawl in that hamper."

"Why, a woollen shawl, of course!" exclaimed Jeanie. "And so, Esmé, as Alice is not interested in woollen shawls, you and I may as well open this affair in the next room."

Quickly speaking, quickly acting, she picked up the laden basket to run off with it. But Alice proved the stronger of the two, and a hint from Flora that they "would break the jam jars if they were not careful," gained the hamper a safe resting-place once more on the carpet, and no more time was lost in opening it. Before the string was quite unthreaded, Esmé remembered to ask a question that had been puzzling her for the past hour.

"Alice, don't tease me again, please, but do tell me who were the friends you were expecting by the steamer that brought this."

Alice Terry looked very puzzled for a few moments, as puzzled as she often made other people look. Then her forgotten words came back to her recollection, and she laughed heartily.

"Why, the friends I expected came, to be sure—the army of brother and sister tourists who landed here, and whose coming gave me a good excuse not to sit still any longer with you good, wonderful specimens of patience and tranquillity.

Fidgeting and restlessness are two of the things that I never feel justified in scolding my pupils for; I am too much afflicted with the diseases myself. They are sufficiently painful miseries any way, without being rendered double instruments of torture. But look! talking of instruments of torture, here is one in your basket. So, having found the sardine-opener, to find the sardines."

"Here they are," said Esmé, unearthing them from their surroundings. "But I wonder why mamma sent them, for she knows that I cannot bear the horrid oily things."

"The very reason why Mrs. Wilson sent them, my dear."

"Why? As tantalizers when I am very hungry, because I hate them?"

"No, my dear Miss Wilson, but that, knowing the largeness of your appetite, and the natural greed of your disposition, there might at least be some little pickings for your betters. For the same reason, you perceive, she has sent this large cake."

"Oh, what a splendid one!" exclaimed Esmé. "And it does smell good, too. Do, Jeanie, please run and fetch a knife. We'll make our dinner off cake, Alice, to-day, you and I. I'm afraid, Jeanie, that Flora won't let you."

"Nor you either, you babies," said Flora, laughing, and in her turn helping to unpack the

hamper, seeing that the others had come to a pause in rapt admiration of their discovered treasure.

A wiser provision than cake, for hungry maidens' dinners, was found at the bottom of it—a couple of large tins of meat and a huge round of boiled beef. Esmé's account of their destitute condition on first arriving at Mrs. Menzies', and of the dinner they had one day made upon potatoes and milk at a wayside cottage during their four days' tramp round the island, really had alarmed poor Mrs. Wilson for the survival of her darling daughter from the hardships of starvation.

The hamper packed with as many substantials as it would hold, figs, cream chocolates, and preserved fruits filling up the interstices, the anxious mother had herself driven with it to the King's Cross Station, and by means of various telegrams and a considerable outlay of shillings and half-crowns, she had ensured its rapid and undelayed transit from one point to another, greatly to the surprise and gleeful amusement of the recipients.

"And now," said Esmé, getting up from the side of the empty basket, "I suppose we may as well dine off the beef instead of the proposed eggs and bacon"——

"Or cake?"

"Or cake! We can have a little extra dinner off that when Granny yonder is not by to talk

about babies. And the tinned meats we can keep to fall back upon when"——

"Many thanks," interrupted Alice. "I guess, my dear, that you can keep your 'we' to yourself as regards that falling back on those sort of bolsters. One rolled on my big toe just now, and it's hard. 'We,' when it's cake or preserved fruits, or even good boiled-beef eating that is in question, but 'I,' if *you* please, when it comes to suggestions of falling back upon anything except one's pillow."

"And now, if you two have done quarrelling, will you be good enough to come to dinner?" said Jeanie. She had been very busy the past five minutes, and now came running in at the open door with a great steaming dish of floury potatoes in her hands. She was laughing at the same time.

"There!" she added as she deposited the dish on the table, "that would have been all your meal this afternoon, ladies, with the addition of bread and salt, if that hamper had not arrived."

"I thought we were to have eggs and bacon," corrected Flora. "Why, you know Esmé went to the shop to order them, on our way down to bathe."

"Yes! She certainly went into the shop, but whether she can have ordered anything is another matter. Look at her cheeks."

Miss Esmé's cheeks were worth looking at.

They were of a beautiful crimson. "There were two kittens in the shop," she pouted, "and—and—I bought those ginger-cushions."

And then Alice caught her round the waist and carried her to the table.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALICE PUTS ON HER APRON.

"ESMÉ, my dear," said Alice across the breakfast-table, "forgive the remark, but you look like a wild woman of the woods, my dear."

"And pray what do you suppose that you look like yourself, at the present minute?" came the retort.

The hands were sedately folded, the mouth primmed up, and then the answer came—"Like a young lady who has just been bathing, my dear Miss Wilson," and then Miss Terry sprang up, and ran away into the next room to avoid the probable reply.

They had all been down for their sea-bathe before breakfast that morning, and when they got back there was a unanimous declaration that they were all too starvingly hungry to wait to dry, and dress, long hair before they had something to eat. Accordingly, as fast as Flora could put the room tidy, Alice make the coffee and fry the bacon over at Mrs. Menzies' fire, and Jeanie and Esmé

lay the breakfast table, they sat down to their meal.

At Arran, as has been said before, ways are primitive and patriarchal, and those folks fare the best, and are the most comfortable, who find little trouble and no degradation in using their own hands to supply their own requirements. The first day of their tramp round the island, our four quick-witted tourists had discovered this fact, and they found plenty of amusement and satisfaction in acting upon it for the future. Even Esmé thought the novel experiences rather fun, as her companions took very good care, unobtrusively, to let only the lightest and pleasantest of the common work fall to her share.

Of course aristocratic and indolent people, invalids, or folks with plenty of money in their pockets, can go to one of the four or five charming and comfortable little hotels on the island, or they can take one of the exquisitely-situated houses, dotted sparsely here and there, for the season, paying an enormous rent, and taking their own retinue of servants with them. But for people who have little money to spend, and wish to spend that in the purchase of the greatest possible amount of health, fresh air, freedom, and the happiness springing from those priceless blessings, it would be impossible to recommend anything better than that they should hire one of the fishermen's little

whitewashed cottages on the sea-shore, and be their own lady-helps, having nothing of superciliousness or contemptuous remarks to fear from neighbours, who for once in their lives are actually venturing to act in the same wise way. If funds are still lower, why, do as our four tourists did; put up at any one of the neat, clean little houses where you can get room to lie full length at night, and spend your days out of doors. The charge for this sort of accommodation, to "helpful bodies," is very reasonable. If you expect to be waited on, according to the general meaning of that expression, either your expectations will be disappointed, or you will have to pay more for the service, not too willingly rendered by this independent tribe, than you do for your lodgings.

And now to go back to Esmé and her friends, claiming a "Thank you!" by the way, for useful information founded on personal experience.

Having brushed and braided her own raven tresses with the energetic expedition usual to her, Miss Terry reappeared in the outer room equipped in a red and blue ample-pocketed apron, which attracted the full amount of astonishment she had expected.

"Whatever have you put that on for?" exclaimed Esmé, with a curious expression on her face of mingled dismay and delight at the well-known sign of present civilisation.

Alice smoothed her apron down tenderly, and put her hands in the large front pocket. "Don't you wear one, yourself?"

"Yes, when I am going to play lawn-tennis. But wherever can you be going to play that game now, and hereabouts?"

"Ah!" was the answer, mysterious and unsatisfactory.

Esmé pouted. "You are so aggravating sometimes, Alice."

"Never mind her, dear," said Flora, smiling. "I don't believe that she has put it on for any purpose but to arouse our curiosity."

"Unless," suggested Jeanie, doubtfully, "those artists have put up a practising net in their field?"

"To the top of the class with you for a brilliant guesser that you are, my dear Jeanie," said Alice, laughing, as she opened the outer door and ran out, closing it behind her, leaving her three friends with three puzzled faces and one pained one, although they had not four between them. Flora's state of pain and puzzle took away her power of speech for some moments. She had not even found her voice when Jeanie, in her turn, threw open the outer door and ran into the yard.

She came back in a couple of minutes looking half inclined to keep up the mystery, but her sister's countenance betrayed too much deep annoyance for

her resolution. She ran up to her with the smiling words of exhortation—

“Don’t look so solemn, Flora. I have guessed once, and I guessed wrong. Now it is your turn; what do you guess?”

“Why, that I am very thankful to hear that your guess was not the right one,” said Miss Campbell, with a very hearty sigh of relief. “All my other ideas have been swallowed up for the present, in the hasty composition of a letter that I thought I might be called upon to write in time for the next post.”

“A letter!” ejaculated young Jeanie, awed by her sister’s tone. “An important letter?”

“Yes, a letter, and a very important letter,” repeated Miss Campbell, “if your guess as to Alice’s movements had proved the correct one, as I was foolish enough just for these startled minutes to fear.”

“But if it had been, what do you mean that you would have done?” asked Jeanie again, at a loss to associate letter-writing with the affair.

“This is what I should have done,” said her sister, gravely. “I should have written to Mrs. Wilson, and told her that as some of our party had made acquaintance with strangers, I thought she might like to have her daughter back again, safe under her own wing.”

Esmé looked as solemn as Jeanie, as she heard that quiet but decided speech. “Do you mean that

you should have done that at once," she asked in a low voice, "and without even speaking any more to Alice about it?"

That question brought a rather wavering touch into Miss Campbell's determined expression. "Well, no," she began rather hesitatingly. "I suppose, in the first place, I should have remonstrated with her on making friends with young men she knew nothing whatever about; and if she had promised to have nothing more to do with them or their lawn-tennis ground, I suppose that would have been the end of the matter. But a party of ladies as young as we are, travelling alone, cannot possibly be too particular or too careful. But Alice knows this quite as well as I do, and as I judged her so unjustly behind her back, so behind her back I most earnestly beg her pardon."

"What for?" asked the young lady herself, at that moment reappearing with the disturbing lawn-tennis apron still on, and her brown eyes bright with some fresh interest.

Miss Alice Terry was a young lady with a remarkable gift for inventing interests for herself. "For other people also," her young pupils, the Elmslies, used to declare. The games and amusements of her manufacture, or suggesting invariably proved more popular with them than those familiar to the world at large, and they had never remembered to find wet days tedious

from the date of the first one she had spent in their home. Just now her efforts were devoted to her own immediate entertainment and her friends' ultimate advantage. She had only come back, in her erratic fashion, to toss a little bit of scorn at Miss Jeanie for her inquisitive following of a few minutes' since. But the pithy remark she had come primed with was forgotten in view of that conclave of grave faces, and those final solemn words she caught, as she opened the door, of Miss Campbell's speech, "I most earnestly beg her pardon."

"What for, and whose?" she exclaimed in bewilderment. "Is it your pardon she'll be afther making the mistake to ask, me honey?"

"No," answered Esmé, laughing. "She leaves that frequently necessary thing for you to do. Just this minute Flora is asking your pardon, for disapproving of that game of tennis you have been enjoying with your artist friends down below, with the price of a chicken hanging on its issue."

Alice gave a quick glance back at Flora as she listened to this doubtful information, but Flora said nothing, and concluding that she had burst in upon some matter private to her three companions, Miss Terry shot her arrow at Jeanie and ran off again.

Twenty minutes later Miss Esmé Wilson, *alias* the wild woman of the woods, was sitting in the rocking-chair reading aloud to Flora, while Flora

brushed out for her the tangled mass of wavy golden tresses. It was a division of labour particularly agreeable to Miss Esmé, and it was lucky for her that her sharp-tongued sister Elinor was not by to see it, nor to make her reflections on it. As it was, the young damsel had the grace once or twice to say, "It is so comfortable, Flora dear; but are you quite sure that you are not tired of standing, or of brushing?"

"Quite sure," was each time the positive answer. "I like brushing this long, bright stuff. I should like my own to be like it; not for vanity's sake, but for the pleasure of looking at it."

"And I wish, then, that we could change," was Esmé's eager reply, made not for the first time to some such remark. "I can't bear light hair. I would ever so much rather have it dark like yours, or almost black, like Alice's."

"What a pity it would be," murmured Flora, rather to herself than to her companion, as she lifted the shining mass and let it ripple away slowly off her fingers before she resumed her brushing, and then matched Esmé's question with the return one of—"Are you sure that you are not tired of reading?"

Of course Esmé was as sure that she was not, as Flora was sure that she was not tired of her occupation; and so the two quietly disposed ones of the party enjoyed a tranquil hour, while the others

spent it in a different manner over at Mrs. Menzies' own especial side of the Menzies domain, the brilliant apron having been donned with a view to playing at cooking instead of lawn-tennis.

"Mrs. Menzies," began Alice, as she made her appearance in the large, clean kitchen, glowing in the mingled light of sunshine and a large bright fire, "do you know what you told me yesterday, Mrs. Menzies?"

Ailsa Menzies turned round, greeting her visitor with a grim little smile of approval, fairly divided between the gay-coloured apron and its wearer. "I may hae telt ye mony wise things to fit daft young bodies, but I mind nae o' ony ae thing in especial, unless I telt ye what the little bit fule laddie Jock said anent your ways wi' him an' his brither—that he'd suner be gude for ye than he'd be bad for ony ane else."

Alice laughed. "Rather a doubtful and mysterious compliment," she said, shaking her head, "unless most people find him very obliging in the matter of badness; but, Mrs. Menzies, it is nothing concerning these laddies of yours, unless maybe their healthy young appetites"——

"Healthy young appetites!" ejaculated Ailsa in interruption. "Healthy dae ye ca' it, and lauch tae when ye say it? I can tell this, young leddy, aye, an' if 'twere the last thing that I wad tell ye: Arran is an awfu' place for appetites—an awfu'

place; an' that the hardworkin mither o' a growin family learns sune to ken. The leddies, they come here Simmer by Simmer, an' they smirk an' they smile, an' they say, blithesome like, 'Our bairnies' appetites grow sae gude here, they eat sae weel.' An' it's Ailsa Menzies that whiles thinks she an' her bairns will follow them to the pairts they come frae, where the folks dinna feel the need upo' them tae eat sae weel! Arran's an awfu' place for feedin."

Out of the kitchen flew Alice to give that information to Esmé, but nearly tumbling over Jamie in the doorway, and catching sight of Jeanie's triumphant face of discovery behind him, she smoothed herself back into sedateness with wonderful rapidity. She gave James the superfluous advice to grow big enough to be seen, and deigned no notice of the beaming face behind him before she turned back into the kitchen.

"And so, Mrs. Menzies, then," she said in the tone of a philosopher, "appetites being so outrageous, those of my friends included, in this hungry place, it rests upon you and me to provide the cheapest food, combined with wholesomeness, we can devise to stay them."

"Aye?" murmured the Scotchwoman, fascinated by the speaker's gravity, and a barely successful attempt to grasp the meaning of the solemn sentences. She was not helped much by a subdued

mutter of, "Her own is the biggest," followed by a second of "Cheap and nasty, like sanded sugar and blackberry-tea."

Jamie signified his impression of the present moral atmosphere of the kitchen by an impulsively muttered "Amen!"

But if he did nothing else by the utterance, he at least restored his mother to her commonplace wits. "The lad's daft," she muttered hastily, gathering herself together, "or else the lassie. Is idle time hangin' sae heavy on yer hands, lassie, that ye maun mak' game o' sensible folk to gie it the pass by?"

"Time hang heavy indeed!" cried Alice, laughing again. "I wish you could teach me how to make it. Give me a leaden weight or two to tie on his feet. At present my time, I am sure, must have an extra pair of wings to most people's. I haven't caught it before it's gone. Can you not give me just a drag or two for it?"

The Scotchwoman looked at the coaxing, joyous face a moment silently. Then her own face softened, and she answered tenderly, "May it be the gracious Lord's dear will aye tae spare ye the drag an' the leaden weight o' sorrow, my bairn. An' now, what is it ye hae come hinderin me for the morn? for I hae wark tae dae."

"And I," briskly answered the girl, "I have put my apron on, on purpose to be ready for work, to provide food for hungry folks, as I told you. In

some parts of the world they have made eatable bread out of sawdust, and I have little doubt that fried slices of pith might be made to constitute an elegant repast for those who like them. But my present intention is, to learn from you how to make oatcake, which we have discovered is an excellent vehicle for butter."

At that point in the morning's proceedings Jeanie ran back to proclaim her discovery, as we have seen, to her sister and Esmé; and when she returned to the kitchen, twenty minutes later, she found preparations already made for the lesson.

The batter-like mixture was ready in the pan, the iron was hot, and she stopped to help and learn. When it was cooked, with more or less skill, by the learners, and hung over a line to dry, the two girls decided to make a pudding for dinner, by way of a surprise to the others. In that business Alice Terry could give better instruction than she could receive in those parts; so Ailsa Menzies left the lassies to their own devices and the free use of her kitchen, while she went about her many and various household duties.

CHAPTER XIX.

"BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW."

As a rule, the kitchen-door stood open on to the yard all weathers and all day long ; but as people of all kinds and degrees were perpetually coming and going there for milk, eggs, to inquire for lodgings, and on all manner of other errands, Alice had put the door nearly close, to shield herself and Jeanie from public view in their floury and egg-beating condition that morning.

Once or twice they had been intensely amused by overhearing scraps of conversation, betraying a generally higher opinion of them on the part of their landlady than they had supposed she entertained, although a little hit at them now and again prevented the danger of their self-complacency growing too great.

"A wheen daft women bodies ye ha' gotten in your apairments the noo, I hear tell," said a woman, pushing the yard gate open, and entering to give utterance to the remark.

Jeanie looked up from her egg-bowl at Alice

Terry with a little low ripple of laughter. "Alice," she murmured, "listeners never hear any good of themselves."

"Little pitchers with long ears don't," came the retort. "*I* am absorbed in my occupation."

But whatever the tenants of the kitchen heard, the stranger's speech did not appear to have reached the especial ears for which it was intended. The visitor came nearer, and repeated in a higher key—

"A when daft women bodies ye ha' gotten, I hear tell."

"Then ye ha' heerd tell a lee."

The remark had been heard this time, and so might the answer have been for a quarter of a mile around. Jeanie started, and incurred the whispered indignation of her instructress in pudding-making by spirting a long trail of half-beaten egg across the table.

"You will have that stentorian wrath directed at you, I shouldn't wonder, when the vindicator of our characters comes back here, and discovers the state of her hitherto spotless furniture, Miss Jean Campbell. I would not be in your shoes for something, I can tell you."

"I don't want you to be in them," replied Miss Jean; "they are a little tight as it is. But if you could get into my ears, unless I can find some bundle of cotton-wool, I might be obliged to you. Her fairy godmother certainly must have endowed

her with the torturing gift of the voices of six men."

"To make up for having endowed you with a silver bell," said Alice, laughing. "Poor little thing! I daresay it is worse for you to have to listen to such harsh sounds than it is for most people. When are those masters and teachers of yours going to let you sing to us all daylong? They might have granted you a dispensation just for these few weeks."

"I took one on the top of Goatfell, you remember."

"Just so, and only tantalized one into wishing for a feast, instead of that absurd little taste of sweetness."

Again the girls' voices in the kitchen ceased, to listen to those outside. The gate had reopened to admit another visitor, and the first, who appeared to have been suffering from temporary collapse, addressed herself to her with the eager—

"Hech then, Meg, here's Ailsa gi'en the lee to Sandy Johnston, wha telt us yestere'en that the women bodies here were daft anes, wi' mair siller than sense."

"An' what may it be 'at maks Sandy Johnston think that?" asked the other gossip. "Has he seen them, or touched their siller?"

"Aye, true then! I reckon I thought ye were by when he telt us o' fetchin away the basket frae the steamer, as he'd gotten word to do by the wires the nicht afore. Thae Southron bodies, frae Lunnon

nae doot, they set upon him, and sair flichtered the puir man."

"Oh, my!" came a low, emphatic exclamation within the kitchen. But as it was inaudible without, the gossip continued uninterruptedly—

"And when they had wrestled for the basket, and nigh put him by his senses wi' their claverin before he'd gotten it up here, then the t'ane o' them gie him the double o' what he was promised, and the t'tither ane gie him a saxpence."

"He may weel say they maun be daft!" ejaculated one of the listeners. But Jeanie clapped her hands over her ears as the third of the women outside thundered out—

"An' he may weel say, if he's the wise man, that he'll no come wi'in the reach o' feelin' the saftness o' Ailsa Menzies' hands till some broth will ha' washed away frae her mind the ill memory o' his leeing tongue. An' it's ill luck for him that her memory is a guid ane."

"O Jeanie!" muttered Alice, with a touch of real concern in face and voice, "the handing-down feud is actually beginning."

"Then you must put your wits to work to stop it," said Jeanie, "while it has only reached the stage of—'And she threatened to strike him.' See, I am sure those eggs are beaten enough; my arms are quite tired. And they begin to look so like that yellow softy-thick stuff in the pomatum

bottles, that I have a beforehand fancy that your pudding will smell like a hairdresser's shop."

"And my own fancy is that it will taste as if it had come out of a witch's caldron."

"How is that?"

"Don't know. Mysteriously interesting, dreadfully fascinating, but"——

"Well, but what?"

"But horrible! Food one would rather give to mischief-making gossips than to the queen who was sitting in the parlour eating bread and honey. Meantime, hand over those eggs. Do you really think, Jeanie, from your meagre knowledge of your country's national character, that the to-be-handed-down-to-generations feud has truly begun?"

"My national knowledge, as you say, is meagre; my acquaintance with human nature may not be much greater; still I judge it possible that a neat little present-day quarrel has set in."

"Umph!" grunted Miss Terry, as she poured her pudding into a basin, floured the top, and tied on the cloth. Then she turned towards the fire to look for her pudding saucepan. There were three there, all full of water, all boiling. Which was she to use?

Going to the door, she called to Mrs. Menzies, to put the question to her, and the Scotchwoman came back with her to decide.

"T'ane is boiling itself clean; that ane winna dae

ye. T'ither is for kail, an' it's this ane is for ye;" and taking the basin from the young lady's hands she popped it in, herself. Alice followed her to the fireplace, and when the saucepan lid was put on again, she laid her hand with a light, firm touch on the landlady's arm.

"An' weel then, and what may it be, I wonder, noo?" asked the woman, wonderingly, but with no unkind gaze at the grave, intelligent young face beside her. It looked doubly grave when it was serious from the seldomness of the event. Jeanie, from her post on the opposite side of the table, had a few moments of speculation as to whether her friend was in fun or earnest. But the first words set her doubts at rest.

"Mrs. Menzies," began the American girl after the slight pause, and in a low, quiet tone, "do you know, though I feel myself to belong to another continent, I have always been fond of your country ever since I was old enough to read about it; and one of the chief things I have admired, has been the grand and glorious way in which your countrymen have kept steadfast to their faith. There was only one thing that they, between whiles, agreed with their enemies in doing."

"And what was that?" asked Ailsa, in a voice as grave as her companion's.

"They forgot, now and again," said Alice, in a slow, word-by-word way peculiar to her when she

was very earnest,—“ They forgot, as it seems to me, that the faith they professed was the faith in the God of love. Don't you think so ? ”

She still had her hand resting on the Scotch-woman's arm, and as she asked that concluding question she turned her eyes from the glowing fire to the rugged face.

“ The God of love,” she repeated. “ It is so easy to forget that, is it not ? I forgot that for a foolish minute yesterday, when that man seemed to suspect me of wishing to be a thief.”

“ An' nae doot, neither,” was the sharp answer, with a quick return to her former angry looks. “ That fule Sandy is enough to anger ye, an' mair than ye. Tae misca' folks indeed ! Daft women bodies, indeed ! He shall feel the weight o' the hand of ae woman body, neither daft nor douce, gin he comes nigh Ailsa Menzies.”

“ No, Mrs. Menzies, he shall not,” came the reply with pleading gravity. “ You love God, and I have already found out from James and Jack how you try to bring them up in the fear and love of God.”

“ Aye,” came the grumbling, scarcely yielding mutter, “ that I dae ; an' if they mistrusted an' miscaed leddies, like that loon Sandy Johnston, I'd dae my duty by them still mair by gieing them that ower the heid as they'd remember.”

“ I am afraid you would,” said Alice Terry,

with continued gravity. "But perhaps that would scarcely help them to believe in your faith in the dear Lord Jesus."

"I dinna follow ye," said Ailsa, half testily.

"Don't you?" came the quiet reply, as the girl's eyes went back to the fire. And then, after some instants' silence she added, almost as though to herself at first, "'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.' You will not keep your anger against Sandy Johnston, will you, Mrs. Menzies?"

"Weel, weel then," replied the woman, relenting into her softer mood again. "O' a' the strange lassies, ye are the maist oot o' knowledge. Ae while sae fule-like, sae like a bairn o' sax or seven, your een glowering, your feet dancing, and your tongue rinnin like a bell clapper. An' then, by whiles, a body might tak' ye for the minister himsel', forbye our new minister is nae wrang o' the side o' ower douceness. What for shuld ye mind sae greatly that I'd be at peace wi' yon loon laddie, Sandy Johnston?"

"Because peace is so good, so comfortable," was the hearty answer; "that in the first place, Mrs. Menzies; and in the second place, for this especial affair, it would be truly a most terrible thought for me, for long to come, if I had to leave this island knowing that my thoughtless and irritable words had been the means of leading two people to break

our Lord's commandment. It is bad enough to quarrel oneself, but to set others quarrelling is mean and pitiful, as well as wicked."

"Ye are sair put about in the matter, ony gate," ejaculated Ailsa. "An' maybe ye are no far wrang about peace being better than warfare, although we ha' had our share o' the battles o' the Lord, as ye say, in the times past. But there, my bairn, I'll keep out o' Sandy's road if he'll keep out o' mine; will that satisfy ye?"

"No, not at all," said Alice, smiling now. "I want you to meet and make friends while I am here to see you do it. You are going to have him up to tea with you this afternoon, and Miss Wilson will send you over some London jam to sweeten it."

"Hech, then, of a' the strange lassies!" reiterated Ailsa, and laughing, in spite of herself, at the petitioner's mingled expression of doubtfulness and daring. "I misdoot me that ye are worse than the blue-eyed ane at winnin your ain way."

"Oh, then you will be friends, and I shall not have made you enemies," was the sudden joyful cry. And, acting on the impulse of the moment, the young girl lifted up her face and kissed the woman. That act ensured her hope, at any rate.

Mrs. Menzies clasped the soft hand beside her for one moment between her own two hard ones

in silence, and then with hasty strides turned her face away and went out of the kitchen.

Alice remained where she was, with her foot on the fender, gazing once more into the glowing coals. Jeanie came round the table and joined her there, putting her arm around her waist, and remaining as silent as herself for awhile. At last she said in a half whisper, "Mrs. Menzies is quite right, is she not, Alice? You are one of the strangest girls I know."

"Why?" was the quiet, meditative reply. "Because I like peace? Because I think it a terrible thing to do the devil's work instead of that of the kingdom of heaven?"

"Not quite that," answered Jeanie in the same low tone as before, "but because you seem to care about—about—things so little generally, and you do care so much."

Some few minutes longer the two girls stood there together quietly, and then their ears were attracted by the sound of fresh voices in the yard outside.

Very different voices these were to those of the two gossips who had helped to fan Ailsa Menzies' smouldering wrath against poor Sandy, and his stolid indignation at the young ladies' offhand endeavours to rid him of his trust.

"Ma'am," began a bright, quick voice, evidently addressing Mrs. Menzies, "would you mind saying

a word for us to that milk-seller girl some time to-day if you see her? She brought us none this morning, and I had to drink my coffee without milk, which I hate to do."

"And ye too, sir," said the Scotchwoman, addressing some one else.

"And I also," was the answer, in the voice which the night before last had so disconcerted Alice with its humble "I am very sorry." It added now, "But going without milk is not quite such a heavy affliction to me as it is to my friend, although I confess that it made me sigh after those last weeks of my stay in these parts last year, when you provided for my wants so regularly and comfortably."

"If the weather breaks you will be able to take us both in this year again, I hope?" asked the younger voice, with the accent of one inspired with the sudden idea of something fresh in the way of pleasantness. But the answer was not encouraging.

"Hech, then, the laddie has nae mair sense than the lassies. Hoo'd I be puttin ye up pray, then, young gentleman, wi' a' thae leddies to the fore?"

"But they have not got the whole house, surely," was the reply, "or they would never choose to make a sitting-room of the lean-to there, when there is such a comfortable one in the front of the cottage."

"Humph!" came a loud grunt from Ailsa Menzies. "I can tell ye this, young gentleman, there's nae sayin on airth what thae young leddies wad or wad no be up to. Only that ye may lay your account wi' it being just the verra thing that ye didna expec'."

"I can believe that," was the calm reply of the elder man.

"An' is it yourself would be liking to get your head punched?" muttered a certain voice within the kitchen. But the owner of that voice and her companion remained where they were by the fire, and were effectually hidden from any glimpse that might have been obtained of them from outside by a primitive screen put up to keep off the dulling effect of the sun—a clothes-horse and a long table-cloth. The conversation without continued.

"But still, another thing," said the younger of the artists, returning to the charge, "even if those lady-lodgers of yours do take up the whole place just now, you said yourself that they only came for a few days, and that you did not expect them to stay much longer with you."

"A' the mair reason that they may," replied that stolid, truly most aggravating Ailsa; and while two mischievous creatures shook with silent laughter in the kitchen, sounds of laughter, as much disconcerted as amused, were uttered in the yard.

"You won't let us catch hold of an inch of hope any way," said the more dignified of the two artists.

"An' whaur wad be the Christian kindness or the use," was the retort, "when Mr. Robinson, douce man that he is, has ta'en the hail place for the next twa months, exceptin only the lean-to yonder, which is nae mair to be depended on in saft weather than your ain tent?"

"Or than your information, as it seems," laughed the lad.

"An' as hoo, then?" was the rather indignant question.

"Why, first you tell us the ladies have not come for long, and may be gone any day, and now you say that the gentleman has taken the cottage for the next two months longer."

"An' weel," said Mrs. Menzies, sententiously, "an' if I did! The gentleman is gane for a' that, and may the leddies no follow? Goatfell Cottage is nae prison, I'm blithe to say. Do you think folks are no free to leave it an' they will?"

Instead of answering this question the elder man asked another, the fruit of the past few moments' puzzle.

"It is the grave-faced, brown-haired one of that party of ladies, I suppose, who is Mrs. Robertson?"

"Ye may mak' your mind very sure that it's

ne'er a ane o' the three giddy young anes," was the cool answer, which apparently was more quietly taken by the two young men listeners than by the young lady ones.

"O Jeanie!" muttered Alice Terry, between laughter and astonishment, as the gate shut the next moment on retreating footsteps. "Jeanie! those gentlemen have gone off thinking that your sister is Mrs. Robertson!"

"What an old brother he would be!" said young Jeanie, reflectively. Alice gave her a little shake.

"A very nice one, I should think. But you are as bad as Mrs. Menzies. When one speaks to you of one thing you reply with something else."

"We Scotch are prudent people," was the mischievous rejoinder. "We are not over partial to giving direct replies."

"You prefer cross questions and crooked answers, in fact," returned Miss Terry, "and consequent muddle."

CHAPTER XX.

"MRS. ROBERTSON" GETS A LETTER.

"OUR last day on this dear, darling, lovely little island!" murmured Esmé meditatively, as she sat holding up a formidable sunshade with one hand and tossing pebbles idly into the water with the other.

Alice picked up a stone, raised herself on her elbow from her sun-bathed sandy couch, and cleverly hit one of Esmé's, sending the two halves spinning away far enough wide of their original course.

"Good for me!" she remarked calmly, as she dropped back to her former position. "'Self-praise is no condemnation,' as one of your modern writers observes, and I have always considered it such a wise announcement, that I consider it worthy of American quotation. But that apart, what a handsome command of adjectives you've got, Esmé. Only, had you not better reserve them for a bigger place? I am afraid if you overload this poor little island you may chance to topple it into the sea."

"And what a nice place that would be for it to be in!" sighed Jeanie, fanning herself with her hat.

"And I should like to know, you two Irish or Yankee oddities," retorted Esmé, "where else an island is, if it is not in the sea?"

"In a river or in a herring-pond, as the case may be, my dearly beloved friend," drawled that provoking Alice, as usual slipping through a hole when she could not get out of the door.

Flora looked up from her knitting with a smile. "If either of the others had given that answer, Alice, by way of getting out of a blunder, I know what you would have called it."

"Real mean," was once more the luxuriously lazy reply. "Was that what you guessed?"

Flora's softly curved lips broke away into a laugh—a laugh somewhat in sound like that of her young sister—a laugh such as had been familiar to her lips in former light-hearted days, before orphanhood and poverty had taught her heart hard lessons to be learnt with gravity. But these weeks in her brisk, clear, native air, and with these brisk-natured, joyous-tempered companions, had begun to work a splendid change in the spring and spirits of the gentle, earnest-minded chief of the tourist party. Not unfrequently now she rewarded Alice's impudence with a laugh.

"I tell you what it is, Alice," said Esmé, with an

air of resolution. "If you don't behave yourself, perhaps you may chance to find yourself toppled over into the sea, and you are not an island ready fitted for that abode."

"What a queer way of putting it!" said Alice, sitting up. "Really, Esmé, I don't believe any one but a genius would have thought of calling the sea an island's 'abode.' I really do guess that the idea must be quite original, and you must be a genius. The dearest desire of my life is gratified."

"By my being a genius?"

"Oh, no—pardon the selfishness—but by my being on terms of familiar intercourse with one. But oh! look there. Does not that look tempting?"

So tempting that Jeanie and Esmé both honoured the sight, now pointed out to them, by springing to their feet to look at it more eagerly. A basket of provisions was being stowed away in a gaily painted boat. A couple of portfolios and colour-boxes followed, and then a gentleman and a fisher-lad began to push it down into the water.

"I wish we were going with them!" ejaculated Esmé. "They are our artist friends evidently, going to have a delicious water picnic—all to themselves, selfish things."

The next moment Miss Esmé blushed scarlet as the younger of the two artists passed her, lifting

his cap to the party of ladies as he went on down to the water's edge to join his friend.

"Poor little mouse!" whispered Alice, with mischievous pity. "It was fairly caught this time, I think."

"Then I don't," retorted the pouting lips; and their owner subsided back again on the sands beneath the doubly sheltering sunshade. However, notwithstanding her care to hide her own dyed cheeks from view, she managed to leave her eyes still free to watch that tempting boat; and the sunshade gradually retired a little more backwards when she saw the fisher-lad leave the boat and the gentlemen, and begin to come towards them with a fluttering little sheet of paper in his hand.

There had been a short, somewhat doubting, discussion between the two young men when they met, which had ended in the elder of them tearing a blank sheet off a letter, writing a few words on it, and delivering it to the boy-sailor to carry to "the tall, grave lady in the grey serge dress and black straw hat."

In obedience to his instructions the messenger handed to Flora Campbell the sheet, headed:—

"To Mrs. ROBERTSON.

"DEAR MADAM,—My friend and I will esteem it a privilege, if you will allow us in some slight measure to return the kindness shown to us on the night of our arrival, by taking you and your friends for a row.

"In any case, we trust to be pardoned for making the request.

"VERNON RIGBY.

"CECIL SEYMOUR."

"Oh! Mrs. Robertson, do say yes," exclaimed Esmé, as her friend finished the reading of this note aloud.

Flora looked at her with gentle remonstrance. "Mrs. Robertson might say yes, Esmé dear, but Miss Campbell must say no. There can be no choice."

And without waiting for assent or dissent to her firm decision, Flora took out a pencil and wrote on the inner part of an envelope directed to herself:—

"*Miss Campbell* gives hearty thanks in the name of herself, her sister, and her friends for the kind offer made to them under a misapprehension. No pardon is needed; were it otherwise, it should be freely given."

The boy carried back this reply; there was an evident start of apologetic surprise on the part of the recipients; they raised their caps, a salute brightly acknowledged by three of the ladies, somewhat shyly and poutingly by the fourth; the young

men and their rough sailor assistant jumped into their boat, lifted their oars, and rowed off.

"And my good wishes go with you for elegant times, for a pair of kind-hearted Britishers that I guess you are," said Alice Terry sententiously, looking after them. "It is a lovely day for a row, that's certain," she added, with a half sigh and a smile at Flora, who returned it readily, as she answered, also regretfully—

"Yes! If only our brother Alick were here, how pleasant it would be to get him to take us out! But in this instance I could have sent no other reply than I did."

"No, certainly not," agreed the American girl. "In America, though, it is different. There we could have accepted the offer as frankly as it was frankly made, although you are *not* Mrs. Robertson. But on this side of the Atlantic I know it is otherwise; and in such matters I am thoroughly of opinion that on the side of orderliness it is quite well to do at Rome as Rome does. Pouting pussie you! what do you think your father would say, if he should be now coming along here in the next steamer from 'Glasga,' and should have happened on you in that boat yonder with a 'parcel o' daft painter bodies'?"

"It is much more to the purpose," retorted Esmé, transferring her pouts to Miss Terry from Flora and the disappearing boat, "very much more

to the purpose what my father would say, if he knew that I am in the company of a polyglot dictionary, as Jeanie properly observes."

"Flora, I believe, deserves the credit of that queer remark, Miss Wilson."

"Does she? Well, whoever made it—whoever made it"—

"Yes?" queried Jeanie, laughing, "what piece of sage advice are you going to bestow upon the polyglot, Esmé? You seem doubtful."

"You have hit the right nail on the head, Jennette," answered the young lady. "I am doubtful. The fact is, you see, I do not wish quite to crush her by further evidence of my genius. And besides, more important thoughts than any concerning polyglot peculiarities have just come into my mind. We can all row, I know, for I know that I can, and I have heard all of you say that you can. If we must not let those gentlemen turn themselves into boatmen for us, let us get a boat and some provisions ourselves, and go for a water picnic on our own account. There can be no harm in that, at any rate."

"N—no!" began Flora, half dubiously. She felt the weight of her responsibility rather heavily sometimes, and she would have preferred that day to keep her small flock together on *terra firma*, or, at any rate, if the members of it must go on the water, to embark with them on a steamer.

But Esmé had set her mind on a boating excursion; Alice and Jeanie both wished for it; the day was lovely, the sea calm as a mill-pond, and it seemed both unreasonable and unkind to refuse to crown the happy fortnight on the island with this parting pleasure.

"And I declare," exclaimed Esmé, with an extra touch of wilfulness added to her usual childlike pleading, "if you will not come with me, I will go off by myself with that boatman yonder."

And pleadings and wilfulness gained the day.

"And we may take the boatman with us?" said Flora.

"Much pleasanter without," asserted Esmé; "but that is a small matter any way, which I am quite willing to leave you to settle as you please. Only, Alice, if he is to come, mind that you and Jeanie bring down provisions enough to feed him as well as ourselves, for I hate to have poor people looking on with hungry envy while I am eating."

And then the little queen of variable impulses dropped herself comfortably back on the sands beneath her sheltering sunshade, while Miss Campbell went to make arrangements about the boat, and the younger sister and Miss Terry ran off to Mrs. Menzies', to forage for picnic supplies, and fetch their shawls.

In the end Miss Wilson had her wish, and they set off without the boatman. A boat for the next

few hours they could have, if they could manage one, but no man could accompany them. All were occupied.

“And so much the better,” laughed poor little Esmé gaily, as they were pushed off from the shore, and started as merrily on their excursion as many others have done on expeditions that should end in woe.

CHAPTER XXI.

*"A TRESS OF GOLDEN HAIR, OF DROWNED
MAIDEN'S HAIR."*

JUST as the party of light-hearted tourists set out on their water picnic, Esmé's parents and her elder sister also set out on one of a more extended nature, but of that more at a future time. Our present concern is with Esmé herself and her friends.

"Which way are we to go, Esmé?" asked Alice, as she picked up one of the oars, while Jeanie took the other. Esmé and Flora were to have their turn afterwards, change and change about. "Fair play's a jewel," as Alice remarked anent the arrangement. But as the idea of the excursion originated with Esmé, she was tacitly considered to have more than the usually accorded right to direct its course.

"Well," she said, answering her companion's request for directions, "let us make for that point yonder first, and when we have rounded that, we can decide where next to go afterwards."

"I should rather think we can," ejaculated Jeanie, turning to look at the point indicated, and then giving a surreptitious glance at her small, brown hands and the rough oar.

Alice caught the glance and the meaning of the exclamation, and answered both with a laughing—"Arrah, then, never moind, me dear. If it's a long row she'll be afther wishin for, it's herself, no doubt, that is the strong and illigant rower intirely. Isn't it, more be token, her lily hands that look like it!"

Vanity of her personal looks was not one of bright young Esmé's failings. So that people loved her and made much of her, she felt it to be a matter of perfect indifference whether she were pretty or ugly. Just at that moment she felt thoroughly ashamed of the tininess and whiteness of her hands, and bestowed upon them a particularly annoyed pout before she said in an aggrieved tone to Alice—

"It is too bad of you to speak like that, Alice, as if you thought I wished to make you do what I would not do myself. I like rowing. I have been out rowing on the Thames for hours at a time, often and often, and I cannot help the look of my hands."

She ended with a little indignant slap of one of the said small hands against the other. At the same moment Alice took one of hers from the oar

she was rowing, and laid it over both her friend's, with the quick tears starting into the laughing brown eyes as she half whispered—

"Esmé dear, you do not really think that I was bringing an accusation against you? I was only making fun of Jeanie's dismay at the lengthy excursion you have mapped out for us; for I believe the distance is farther than your inexperienced eyes imagine. However, I am quite as anxious as you to round that point. It was the very thing I meant to propose, if you had not cared to decide. So, if it is to be managed, we will manage it, and you shall give your fair share of work to the undertaking besides. I know you well enough, be sure of that, to know that you would rather spare your friends than your hands."

"And I know that you are a great deal too good to me," murmured back penitent Esmé. "You ought to be angry with me for speaking to you so crossly."

"Thank you, ma'am," was the smiling reply; "and get up a storm in a teacup. Much obliged to you for the suggestion. Although I *can* swim, I should prefer taking a bath as I did a couple of hours ago, when I am expecting it. That's reminds me, by the by, why don't you learn to swim?"

"What is that?" called Jeanie, half-catching

what was said. "You are going to teach Esmé to swim, do you say?"

"Yes, I do say," was the prompt reply, "if she will learn; but I did not say so before. I was rather inveighing against all you lazy things for not knowing how to swim already. If I had my will, every one should be made to learn. Do a heap of them quite as much good as learning to read, and be of far more healthy, wholesome use to a lot of folks than they let the other accomplishment be to them."

"Including those who are to have the future reading of the poem on the Chatterbox?" asked Esmé.

"Those indeed!" was the haughty rejoinder. "With one exception, madam, whom I need not name, those who have the wisdom to peruse, and the wit to comprehend, that elegant and learned production will most assuredly also have had the wit and wisdom"——

"Of Sidney Smith," interrupted Esmé. "There is a book with that title in papa's library. I took it down once, and looked into it; but unfortunately I lighted upon a bit of wisdom, so I shut it up again without searching any further for the wit. When do you think will be a good time to have our picnic, Flora?"

"When we are hungry," muttered a voice not Flora's.

But Flora laughed as she said, "Just so! I don't think, Esmé dear, that I can invent a better reply."

A shadow of a pout came back. "I do, then. I am hungry now. Alice made me laugh so much, I had scarcely time to eat any breakfast this morning. But all the same, I don't want to eat my luncheon just here in front of that row of houses, and those staring people waiting for the steamer."

"Then what do you say to getting round that point first, if possible? Or having just a piece of cake when we are a little farther from the shore, and our real meal about half-past one? It is only a few minutes past twelve now."

Flora's suggestions falling in agreeably with every one's views, as they had a knack of doing, from the simple fact that they were invariably advanced wholly with a view to the pleasure of others, and with no thought for herself, the rowing was continued with a steadiness and regularity that spoke well for the strength and skill of the two pairs of strong young arms wielding the oars.

Esmé looked on with generous admiration. "I am glad, after all," she said at last, "that you two have taken the first turn. You have been the admired of all beholders. It would have been the reverse, I am afraid, if we others had made

the first start. At least, I don't know about Flora, but I speak for myself. I am glad my exhibition is to be more private; for although I can row, I certainly cannot manage it in the manly fashion of you two strong creatures."

Alice and Jeanie laughed, and rested on their oars a minute.

So gay and light-hearted they all felt just then. So well, so strong, so full of bright and vigorous life. They and death seemed so far apart that day, that they might be forgiven for forgetting that Time owns so grim a power. There is a time for all things—"A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

Hot as it was on shore, on the water there was just enough breeze, as Alice expressed it, to move a punkah without hands and a long string.

"What is the string for?" asked Esmé, dreamily.

"To save the expense of wings," came the prompt reply.

At that unexpected information the young lady's dreamy blue eyes opened to their widest extent, and the young lady sat up and bent forward towards the rower opposite her.

"Miss Alice Terry, do you quite know—I mean do you at all know, what you are talking about,

or are you suffering from incipient sunstroke? As a true friend and sincere well-wisher, I regret for your sake that we are at the present time at an inconvenient distance from Colney Hatch. Still—you know—at a pinch—my friendship is capable of much."

"And mine," was the considerate reply, "even to the extent perhaps of asking the attendants at that establishment to which you refer to humour you as to wings if it be possible."

Esmé raised her hands and turned towards Flora. "Now really, Flora, did you ever hear anything so shameful as that? To turn her wings on to me, who never said a word about them."

"No, my dearly beloved injured friend, and candidate for we won't repeat where," said Miss Terry, taking the reply upon herself. "You said never a word about wings, that is true. But I guess that you wondered why a string was needed for a punkah. In the hitherto uninvented lands I have no doubt they will be pulled without one, but in the present regions where they are used, wings being difficult of construction and ladders unsightly, they are worked by"——

"A telephone," interjected Jeanie, whose voice was as yet more accurate than the information of an abstruse nature to which it occasionally gave utterance.

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"O Jeanie, darling," half-laughed, half-sighed Flora.

Alice turned round to look at her. "Never mind, Jeanie, my bairn. Dinna let them flout ya. If you have made a mistake deserving of smiles, take this comfort to your heart, that there's ne'er a newspaper, nor scarcely a biographer that ever wrote, that does not merit the same."

"Whatever do you mean, Alice?" asked Flora, surprised, and with some admixture of curiosity as to how ever her friend could be going to prove her statement. For it was a well-known fact that the young lady never made one that she could not prove after some fashion of her own, plausible in the appearance if not in fact. She looked up at her friend now with a grave shake of the head, and a deep-drawn groan.

"Miss Campbell, your ignorance astonishes me as greatly as it grieves me. Is it not told us frequently, repeated from generation to generation with relation to the famous of all nations—'Whole multitudes were moved by his eloquence'? Jeanie, if you giggle I'll throw up my brief. To resume. If, then, the sound of one man's voice is capable of moving tons upon tons' weight of the particularly lumpy matter of which most multitudes are composed, can it be a matter for fitting doubt or scorn that the alternate brays, squeaks, and sobbing mutters of the telephone

should usefully agitate the indefinable heart of a pun—Esmé!" with startling abruptness and change of tone and manner, "I dare you to touch that cake till I've shipped my oar, and am ready to see to the just division."

"You very nearly saw it topple over into the water, startling me like that."

"Then I should have had to topple you in after it to fetch it back. Under those circumstances I should have generously divided the whole of a thick outside between you three, in spite of my known love of crust, and have contented myself with the little core. How grieved you would have all felt, poor things!"

"And something worse than grieved, perchance, if we had feasted on the generously relinquished spoils."

The next moment Esmé Wilson's tone of voice was very different, as she said anxiously, "O Alice! what are you doing? Do take it all; you must. I am sure you must be hungry, and can eat it. Please do take it again."

But Alice very firmly put back the paper-plate with the other half of a great slice of cake upon it. "My dear Esmé, since my sojourn in this 'awfu' hungry place,' I have discovered that my besetting sin is growing to be greed, or unsatisfied feelings of starvation. I am not yet thoroughly aware which of the two, and the doubt worries

me. Please let me have the chance to learn the truth, one way or the other."

"Eat the cake first and learn after."

"I thank you, no. That would be giving an unfair advantage to the claims of greed."

"Its claims to what?"

"To the post of honour as my besetting—I beg your pardon, Flora, post of disgrace, I meant. But I am only laughing at sounds, not at sense. Don't put down my besetting sin, for your part, as a proneness to jest about serious matters, please, my revered chieftainess."

"We shall have to put you down altogether into the bottom of the boat for a while, if you don't contrive to make less of yourself somehow," was the rather irrelevant reply. "Jeanie is in a state of total eclipse."

"And can't see to eat her cake, do you signify?" said Alice. "Poor little thing!"

"Cannot even see to get it," corrected Esmé, "which makes her into a much poorer little thing, you see. And now we are to change places, are we not? You and Jeanie to play the part of fine lady Lazinesses, Flora and I to ply the oars for a while."

But Alice and Jeanie would not agree to the suggestion. Refreshed by their light luncheon and their rest, they manfully dipped their oars again, steering their course towards the desired point.

For many a long month would that point remain impressed upon their memories in its lights and shadows, its hollows and projections, in all its tender and weird beautifulness.

When thousands of miles were between her and that jutting point of the Arran hills, Alice Terry could still see, clearly as she had done that day, where the line of the crimson-glowing heather broke; and still see the two sheep on the top of the little ridge, standing sharp and white against the far blue sky; could still see, with the thrill of pity, their startled hurry and helpless perplexity, as, with a bound and a rush and a shrill bark, the half-trained collie-dog came up to them, and executed a terrifying, but joyous and harmless, sort of war-dance around its trembling charges.

In those days to come, Alice still could hear, as plainly as now, Esmé Wilson's low-breathed, half-shy murmur, "Poor creatures! Fear is such a terrible torture, if people only knew it." She could still hear the low-breathed answering murmur of gentle, faithful, Flora Campbell, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

She still heard Esmé's whisper back, turning from the sheep, as her friend had done, to herself, to them all.

"O Flora! if we could only know—if I could

only feel that I did belong to that flock ; that there was that Shepherd watching for me too, that the dogs should not harm me in the end."

"But, Esmé dear," said Flora Campbell, so gently, so lovingly, "you can know it—you do feel it. The Shepherd of the sheep, our Saviour, never loses sight of one of us. You love Him ; can you not trust Him ? "

"Him ! yes," replied Esmé, with slow-dropping tears. "It is myself that I cannot trust, that I have no right to trust. 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' it is said, and I !—— There is ever present with me one dog, ready to tear me to pieces, to snatch me out of His hand. Alice was speaking awhile since of besetting sins. Mine is plain enough—my perpetual remembrance of myself. I fight and fight, but it is stronger than I. It is just like a savage dog ; it has a strong, cruel hold upon me, and will not let me go. And the very fighting with my selfishness seems of itself, sometimes, to be only another means of keeping myself, as of such vast importance, still more before myself."

Flora put her arm around her troubled friend, and said with increased tenderness, "Do you remember the words of St. Paul, dear, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,' and 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall' ? Confidence in ourselves is no proof, you see, of safety, but the fear and trembling are far more

encouraging in that respect, seeing that it is God Himself that worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. The Shepherd has given you the will to follow Him; nourish that will, and for the present dwell less on that selfishness that you complain troubles you so much, and more on your love of Jesus. Thinking of Him most and first, before even my own helplessness and sin, is a great help to me. I think it might be so to many."

"Ye would not come to Me that ye might have life," said one of the rowers in low tones, as Flora ceased.

It was not Jeanie, for where she sat she could only now and again see, from the faces opposite, that a grave conversation had taken the place of the merry chatter of an hour or so ago. She could not hear its softly spoken sentences. But it seemed to Alice herself as though neither could it be her voice that uttered those words as she bent backwards and forwards with her oar, and the boat glided over the water.

They were very near the point now. They were out of sight of all human beings but themselves—they, the sky, the clear waters of the bay, the green and heathery hills, the sea-birds and themselves. When they set out, yachts, boats, steamers, had all been visible, but all were beyond sight, out of their horizon now.

In their little boat they were alone with them-

selves, and with the One who is nigh unto all them that call upon Him—He who is with His helpless sheep though they walk through the valley of the shadow of Death—He who careth even for the sparrows. Of themselves they were as helpless as the sparrows, just those four weak girls, but they were safer than the strongest—safer than the bravest, the most skilful, or the boldest, for they loved and trusted One who has said, "Fear not, I am with thee;" "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

"Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

CHAPTER XXII.

. ALICE TRIES THE HIGHLAND FASHION.

A SLIGHT shock from Jeanie's oar coming rather unexpectedly and sharply against the stones under the water; a consequent slight swerve round of the boat; a quiver throughout its whole small frame, either from pain or indignation, it might seem, at the grinding of its aggressive little nose against the rocks; then a masterly push-off by Miss Terry, a joint stroke onwards, two strokes inwards, and the point was rounded, the miniature harbour on the other side gained, the shallow, wet shore reached; and, pulling off boots and stockings, the four girls sprang out, pulled up their barque high enough to make it safe, laid the oars safely inside, gathered up the packets of eatables, and made their scrambling way to a little high heathery knoll, whence a good view could be obtained, at the same time that they kept the boat in sight.

"What would it signify to us, I wonder,—I mean, would it matter much if it drifted away?" asked Esmé, whose bump of locality was either non-

existent or certainly undeveloped. Alice Terry's, on the contrary, was enormous. As Esmé put her question, Alice put down the packet of hard-boiled eggs she had just opened, sprang up, and took a hasty survey of their position. Then she said quietly—

“No; the loss of the boat would be of very little consequence to us indeed. See there! we are close to a road which leads past the hotel about, say, two miles from here, on to our present abode, three miles off or thereabouts. Or else, putting up with a little rough marching, we can cut across there in the opposite direction, get down into the glen, and so home that way, nearly a mile less in distance, I should imagine, but about twice as far reckoning by the time it would take to do it; so I suppose you would prefer the road.”

“And meantime,” interposed Flora, with a smile, “I do not suppose, but am quite sure, that I should much prefer that we should not be reduced to the necessity of trying either route.”

Jeanie looked round at her sister rather anxiously. “Why, Flora, are you feeling too tired to walk even that distance?”

A bright, loving smile was the young sister's reward for her solicitude. “No, dear, I am not tired at all. I ought to be ashamed to confess it if I were, seeing that I have been taking my ease while you two were doing all the work. But I am

not in the least tired, really. When I spoke just now, I was only thinking how vexatious it would be to have to devote the remainder of our tour money, and more besides, to paying for a lost boat. Decidedly I hope it won't drift away."

"And so do I," calmly remarked Miss Terry; "for, under my present circumstances, walking back along the road past the hotel would be embarrassing to me, owing to the early prejudices unfortunately instilled into even my noble republican brain in early youth. And as I have not been born and bred a Highlander, I fully believe that your spitefully conservative stones would resent my attempt to walk over them barefoot, if we chose the more rough and lonely path."

"I expect they would," said Jeanie. "I have a fancy that they might even choose to make me suffer for doing so. But I don't mean, and why should you?"

"Because I have left my foot-coverings in the boat yonder, to have a chat over their many grievances, in my service, with the oars, and I mean to leave them their liberty until we come within view once more of those admiring throngs Esmé spoke of when we started, who are no doubt waiting to give us an ovation on our return."

"Under those circumstances," said Flora, laughing, "if I were you, I should put them on out of view instead of within view."

"Don't be too hard upon her; that is what she meant," explained Esmé, considerately. "But you know we discovered long ago that she has an element of the Paddy in her."

"But none of the Cockney, thank goodness!" muttered the young lady under discussion. "Queenie, what do you mean by breaking those unfortunate little nails of yours doing up those buttons, when you know that, if I pride myself on one thing more than another, it is on the masterly way in which I can fasten your boots? Now, ma'am, yield to your betters."

Esmé feebly resisted, clinging on to one refractory button over which she had been struggling for the past minute. "That is just the way I get spoilt," she murmured. "Directly anything seems a little hard or disagreeable to me, some one else does it instead. And so I go on, day by day, growing deeper into the supposition that life ought to be all smooth for me."

"Don't say that you *do* go on in that way," replied Alice, quietly, as she resolutely took her own will with the boot buttons, and proved the justice of her claim to superior ability in that line by having them all done up in less time than it had taken Esmé, without her button-hook, to do up one.

Esmé's face and words gave grateful thanks. "But what else can I say?" she added with reference

to her friend's last remark. "I must say that I do go on deceiving myself if I see that I do."

"Who is Irish, so called, now?" asked Alice Terry, laughing. "Foolish little Queenie! How can it be possible to see that you are deceiving yourself? Directly you have attained the point of seeing, it is a proof that conscience is awake, and that you have mounted above the dark valley of deception. After which 'Pilgrim's Progress' illustration, allow me to suggest that I am ready for mutton, nuts, and apples."

"Then crack that to begin with," cried Jeanie, tossing an egg across to her.

"What is in this paper?" asked Esmé, opening a parcel near her for the satisfaction of curiosity, as she put the question. Jeanie answered it.

"Those are fresh-herring sandwiches, and very good you will find them. They are the herrings we left at breakfast, and Mrs. Menzies was wise enough to suggest our using them up like this. All the chief bones are taken out, and she says the little ones left won't hurt a mouse nor a baby."

"Perhaps not!" ejaculated Esmé, looking somewhat ruefully at the remains of one in her hand that she had begun to feast upon. "Mrs. Menzies may be as right about the mice and babies as she is in her opinion that salt is nicer in porridge than sugar. But meantime your bony sandwiches are

rough eating, like Alice's bit of way yonder into the glen."

However, whether hunger strengthens the capabilities of throats, or the Scotchwoman was really right in her opinion as to the extreme innocence of the overlooked bones, that picnic party managed between them to swallow herring sandwiches and everything else eatable they had brought with them, and, moreover, without choking. Having adopted their usual plan of bringing everything but the milk in paper, when their mountain meal was over they had no trouble or anxiety as to looking after baskets, collecting plates, &c.

With one final long gaze around, on as much of the lovely island and its surroundings as they could see from their height, Flora set the example of a return to the boat, and was followed by Alice Terry, who descended upon her, after the nature of a miniature avalanche, with a bound and a rush, and a wild resounding whoop that startled the echoes and the sea-birds together; and then, with their arms around each other's waists, the two danced down together to the atom of a beach.

"Well done, chieftainess," exclaimed Miss Terry. "Look out, my feeble friends above there, for next week's issue of the Arran 'thunder-and-lightning' largest-circulation-in-the-world gazette."

"What to find, when we have looked out for it?"

"Why, the paragraph relating how the dignified and graceful, the noble and from many chiefs descended Flora Campbell, present guardian, guide, supporter, friend, of a small but devoted band of followers, was so elevated by repeated draughts of a white liquor to be nameless, that she condescended to join in the pastimes of her irresponsible and simple-minded adherents."

Miss Campbell looked up quickly from the boat, with a heightened colour and pained expression on the soft oval face. "Do you really think I am so very stiff and solemn, Alice dear? I do try to be cheerful, to be more like you."

Alice stood suddenly still, with her hands dropped down by her sides. At last she said with almost a gasp of astonishment—

"To be like whom? Flora, do you not know that I would give both my little fingers and the tip of—well, no, not the tip of my nose; it would make mamma angry—but the tip of my toes, to be like you?"

"And so would I," said the young sister Jeanie, heartily. "But one might almost as well wish to be perfect at once. And meantime, Alice, without getting one bit more like Flora, you have apparently been parting with the tips of one or two of your toes, at any rate."

Esmé sprang forward and looked down at her friend's bare feet, and gave a little pitying shudder

as she saw they were bleeding in several places. She raised her eyes from them to their owner's laughing face.

"Are you setting up for a Spartan boy, Alice?"

"Only going into training for one yet, beloved knight of the doleful countenance," was the cheerful answer; "and I am happy to assure you, from personal experience, that the sufferings of that historical Spartan boy must have been greatly exaggerated in those sympathetic days of our scholastic life. I don't suppose that he felt anything. I did not even know that my feet were cut until Jeanie drew my attention to the fact. But enough of feet; hands are the present order of the day. There is Flora making a wild attempt to get the boat afloat by herself."

"Flora is as much too independent as I am the other thing," said Esmé, running forward and popping her two little white hands on the side of the boat. Certainly from their appearance it might have been judged that Flora would not be much the better for their aid. However, they had good will in them if not much strength. and with "a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether," the four girls had got their barque afloat just as two gentlemen came in sight along the brow of the hill, and began to run down to their assistance. Alice caught sight of the newcomers first, and with a glance down at

her bare feet hurried the embarkation with a hasty—

“Jump in, Flora and Esmé, jump in! Jeanie and I have got our boots off; we will give the final push.”

And giving that final push, she sprang over the side at the same time, with all the skill and agility of a practised boatman—“boatwoman,” perhaps one ought rather to say; only, you remember, Miss Terry was a native of the country that sets the example of dropping those distinctions with regard to titles. Women authors are no longer,—thanks, I am told, to the dictum of the United States,—assailed with the hideous appellation of *author-esses*, pronounced by some of the stronger sex—it may be from defective education, perhaps!—*author-asses*.

But to drop that little matter, as Miss Terry would irreverently add in a mutter, if she were by, “like a hot potato.” She sprang into the boat, scarcely wetting the tips of her wounded toes with the water. Jeanie jumped in after her with a splash and a dash and a tumble, and a general shower of all things from a pair of soaked stockings.

“Please to keep your feet to yourself, ma’am,” said her sister, laughing, as Jeanie went stumbling about like an uncertain little calf, trampling the kiltings of all her companions’ dresses with her drippingly-clad feet.

She looked up with reproachful expostulation as Esmé added, with a twitch back of her skirts, "Yes, indeed. Drowned rats should not make themselves obtrusive, my dear Jeanie. So you had better make haste, and sit down quietly."

"But I don't know where to sit down," was the piteous exclamation. "You and Flora have got our places. Flora has got mine."

"Your pardon, my good madam," said Alice, putting her arm around the bewildered maiden's waist, and settling the matter of her seat by pulling her down beside her on the cushions. "I beg your pardon for acting thus persuasively, but I fear, my beloved Sandy, that the white liquid we have been partaking of has been as much too strong for your brain as for your sister's. I see it won't do; we shall have to let you have your 'whusky' next time we come on an excursion."

"Ah! mind you do," laughed Jeanie. "I wonder what it tastes like. But, remember, I shall expect you to get it of Dirk Hatteraick, or some other horrible old robber-cave smuggler. And meantime those two have got our places, as I said before, whatever you think of the state of my brain."

"And as I said before, or might have, those two haven't. I guess they have got their own; although, knowing their characters, I do not in the least wonder that you doubt their honesty."

"O Alice! you aggravating thing!" exclaimed Jeanie; "do talk sense just one moment. They have got our places, or, at any rate, Esmé has got the place of one of us. That agreement about her doing the row back was all nonsense, of course; you know perfectly well that she cannot."

Jeanie's words were meant in all love, but for once Miss Esmé Wilson's pout was one of real anger as she exclaimed—

"I do wish, Jean, you would hold your tongue about me. I cannot bear the way you all have of seeming to think that I am a baby, or a helpless idiot almost. It is not because you are all bigger than I am that you are so very much stronger, I can tell you, once for all; and for once in my life, at any rate, I choose to prove it."

She lifted an oar as she spoke, and plunged it into the water with a resolute dash. Flora took the other, and they were about to start in a pained silence when the gentlemen, who had been having a short conversation on the height above, now sprang down to the beach, accompanied by the fisher-boy, and called out—

"Your pardon, ladies; but the tide is now against you, and you will find the pull back such a heavy one that we think you may be glad of this lad's services. We shall not want him any more, ourselves, for we have given up our own boat

some time since, and are intending to walk back. Will you have him?"

"A capital idea!" said Alice Terry, with a glance at her companions opposite for their permission to accept the offer. But before Flora could do more than lean forward over Esmé's shoulder, Esmé herself called out in clear, decided tones—

"Thank you! We are very much obliged to you for thinking of it for us. But we will not accept the offer, thank you, because we have rather a strong wish to have accomplished the whole expedition ourselves."

"I fear you will find it more than you have reckoned for," was the reluctant answer. But Miss Esmé was determined. With a bow to the gentlemen, and a half turn round towards Flora, she made her first stroke from the shore.

"You have terribly disappointed our artists, Miss Wilson," remarked Alice in a low tone. "They were so glad to have found some way in which to help us, in return for the slight aid we rendered them, that you might have let us accept it, if only for charity's sake. I had no idea you could be so hard-hearted."

"Nor I either," replied Miss Esmé herself, with a glimmering little smile of returning good-humour. "I could not have displayed so much moral courage if Jeanie had not just before roused

me to such a tremendous determination to display my physical prowess."

"Oh, for a dictionary!" sighed Alice.

"Or a dissertation on the capacities of the English language," laughed Jeanie, restored to happiness by a whisper from the small rowler opposite of "Dear old Jeanie."

Clouds in their moral sky were shortlived affairs, although the one that had just faded away had more dread consequences than poor Esmé dreamt of when she let it influence her. The cloud was gone. The young faces were wreathed in smiles again. The storm was to come that would threaten to banish smiles from all of them for this mortal "for ever."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AND THEY CANNOT SWIM."

"ALICE," said Esmé, happening to catch sight of a bare, cut toe peeping beneath her friend's dress when they had put a few yards between themselves and the shore, "Alice, don't you really mean to put on your boots and stockings now?"

"The cart before the horse! How funny it would be!" remarked Miss Terry seriously, gazing down into the water as she spoke with a meditative air, as though apostrophizing the fishes therein, as to some of their projected proceedings with which she disapproved. Then she lifted herself up.

"Esmé, to reply to your question, and not to put too fine a point upon the matter—I don't."

"But you may catch cold."

"'Might your name be Brown?' 'It might, but it ain't,' replied a countryman of mine. I have always admired that man. He was courteous and philosophical."

"I wish you weren't."

"Not courteous? Ah! I have occasionally tried

to cure myself of the defect; but it is no good. It is altogether too strong for me. If I am anything, I am courteous."

"Then you are decidedly nothing, and I don't like ghosts," said Jeanie, taking up the conversation cudgels for Esmé, who was evidently having quite enough to do to attend to her oar.

The shelter of the tiny harbour was lost now, and the current was running strong against them. Besides, the wind had freshened, and the water, though by no means rough, was no longer the perfect mill-pond for silvery smoothness that it had been when they came across.

The two forced idlers looked at their companions' energetic efforts every half minute or so, and exchanged furtive glances with each other. At last Alice said in an offhand way, as though with no thought whatever beyond what she was saying—

"After all, that walk across to the glen would have been very amusing. And the walk in the glen itself would be most beautiful just at this hour. Don't you all think that perhaps we are, after all, throwing away a pleasure? I wish every one would agree to let us go back to our 'Point' again."

"But how about the boat, if so?" asked Flora, in an evident tone of consent as far as she was concerned, if that knotty point were settled. "Do

you propose that we carry the boat between us on our heads, as people do their canoes?"

"Well," was the reflective answer, "even to do that might be useful by way of an experimental experience for future times. But my present idea is to get our artists' fisher-boy yonder—they are still there—to take the boat back for us. Shall we?"

"No," said Esmé now, with a touch of returning temper. The few moments' pause while the point was being discussed between Alice and Flora had given her back her breath, and she added as resolutely as ever, "Not to put too fine a point upon the matter, Alice, as you said just now, I reply, No, we won't. You and Jeanie had your will of rowing us here, and Flora and I are going to have our will of rowing you home again."

"Then it will be a case of singing, 'We won't go home till morning,' I expect," answered Alice, resignedly. "Come, Jenny Wren, we had better begin at once." More seriously she continued to Esmé herself—

"You forget that in coming, Jenny and I had the tide with us after the first half-hour or so; while you have got it against you all the while, unless you do really keep us out until it turns again."

"How terribly hungry you will be for your supper, if I do!" laughed Esmé

But that was all the answer she did vouchsafe to the remonstrance, and once more the boat made its slow way through the water. And the two artists on the heights above neglected the beautiful view they had come there to paint, and while their attendant lay dozing on the heather with his cap over his eyes, dreaming of a pleasantly earned day's wages, his employers wasted time and sheets of paper in sketching a common little, rough-a-tough pleasure-boat with four figures in it, faces undiscernible.

They might as well have stopped in their London lodgings in Camden Town, and spent their Saturday afternoons sketching by the side of the Serpentine in the Regent's Park, if that was the way in which they were going to idle away their Scotch hours, and their abilities. But there! how hard everybody always is upon everybody else! What is the good of always finding fault? No doubt these poor fellows had been working steadily enough for weeks past, and months past even. They had a right to amuse themselves with the child's play of painting a little boat with four figures, for a few minutes if they liked. They took their eyes away from it at last, turned themselves towards the glen, and set about their intended occupation, but with somewhat divided minds.

"Don't you wish you had got some sisters,

Rigby?" said the younger of the two as he turned over his brushes rather absently.

Vernon Rigby laughed. "What are you thinking of, Cecil? Sisters, indeed! Why I have got them by the score, or something of the sort. You have seen about a dozen of them, I should think, yourself."

Young Seymour echoed the laugh good-humouredly. "I forgot. I beg your sisters' pardon, Rigby. I don't mean that I have forgotten them; they are too good friends of mine for me to do that; but I forgot what I was talking about. I have no sisters, at any rate, and I should think that it would be awfully jolly to have two like that little one with the gold hair, and the tall one who came to our help the other day, and who jumped into the boat so cleverly just now."

"Two of each kind?" asked his friend.

"No, thank you. Two altogether would satisfy me, I expect," with another laugh, "since I have not been used to any."

And then they set to work in earnest at their sketching. The season was getting on, and they must use their brushes while the sun shone, if they wished to carry well-filled portfolios with them when they wended southwards.

For a few minutes after the artists had turned their faces inwards Esmé worked far better at her oar than she had set out with doing. Although

she had not an atom of vanity in her composition, still she was afflicted with a considerable portion of shy self-consciousness, and it had embarrassed her terribly to be rowing beneath the watchful eyes of those two young men, who so persistently kept their stations in full view of them.

She could not distinguish either their faces or expressions, any more than her own could be distinguished, but she was perpetually casting little nervous glances upwards at the two white patches above the blue serge coats, which had before this proved so disconcerting to one of that band of tourists. And not only did her doing so naturally interfere with the steadiness of her rowing, but she was also so tormented with the idea that comparisons were being made between the boat's progress, now, and what it would have been with a change in the oarsman, that she was more feverish and breathless with worry than with work.

"Those poor things are worse than cows, are not they?" whispered Alice mischievously at last. She had looked about and around her as usual, and very quickly discovered the state of affairs. To her first whisper she added another.

"Shall I wave Jeanie's scarlet stockings at them, dear? The effect cannot well be to make them run at us, under the circumstances, and so they may drive them off."

But before Esmé could accept or decline this

friendly offer of attempted relief, the artists had turned their backs upon nervousness and impudence, and the young rower grasped her oar more firmly in the two small, white hands, and bent herself to the task she had undertaken with somewhat more, poor lassie! of self-willed energy than of actual power. Alice and Jeanie, with a whole fund of superfluous strength at their disposal, dared make no more requests to be allowed to use it; so they leaned back against the cushion and watched the sea-birds.

"Cruel, greedy thing!" suddenly ejaculated Jeanie, as a snowy-plumed seagull suddenly darted downwards near them, and as quickly flew upwards again with a quivering, silver-shimmering fish in its beak. Jeanie threw up her arms as she spoke, waving them about with a cry.

"What are you doing, my dear Jeanie?" demanded Alice, rousing out of a few moments of dreamy abstraction, and staring in surprise at her companion's wild movements. "Are you practising calisthenics, or are you seized with a fit of the fidgets?"

"I was seized," said Jeanie, calming down again with a sigh, "with an intense desire to frighten that horrid bird up there into dropping a fish, it caught almost from the very side of the boat."

"Oh—h!" came the slow reply. "Ah! yes—I see—horrid bird, Jeanie dear. Weren't those her-

ring sandwiches good? Shall we have some more to-morrow?"

Jeanie stooped towards her friend as though brushing a little fleck of spray off her dress as she muttered very low, and with the ghost of a giggle, "If we get home by then."

They had been on board the boat some little time, but they were still well within sight of their treasure-trove of a harbour, and three of the party were beginning to feel rather tired of its insignificant aspect. They had taken more than two hours to reach it, with only a very few occasional rests. It appeared tolerably certain that, if Miss Esmé Wilson persisted in her resolve to keep one of the oars, five or six hours, not to reckon pauses, must elapse before they could get back. Esmé had rowed exquisitely-built little boats, warranted to weigh a little less than nothing, and to go of themselves wherever required, and all that sort of thing, it was true, on the Thames about Richmond or Henley in the boating season; and she had lounged a few yards up, and a few yards down, for the chief part of a summer afternoon with a dainty oar in a dainty hand, really keeping the oar too, excepting when such little accidents happened as the sun growing so hot that she was quite obliged to take to her parasol instead, or having to wait under some friendly balcony to drink afternoon-tea, or beside some flower-gemmed lawn to sip iced lemonade.

But on sea-water Esmé had never rowed before. She found it, in very truth, far harder work than she had expected, and began to feel secretly despondent.

In a few minutes from the time of starting, the poor, foolishly-wilful girl's tender hands had begun to blister with the rough oar. The dozen and one things that day by day she could do for herself, or others, from indolence or want of thought were left undone; but this thing, that was really beyond her strength, she chose to do, persuading herself against her secret consciousness that it was her duty. Alas! the "duty" was not left to her performance long.

In some awkward twist of the oar it tore open one of the blisters, and with a cry of pain she loosened her grasp, and the next instant the oar had slipped into the water.

Jeanie clasped her hands aghast. "Oh, we can never get back now!" And at that cry Esmé started up echoing it, and threw herself half over to regain the oar.

The whole of her three companions bent, with a sudden start and exclamation at her dangerous position, over to the same side to make a clutch at her. There went up a second cry, mingled of dismay and terror—a sudden commotion in the waters. The boat had turned over, and the whole four girls were struggling in the current.

"And only one of us can swim," shrieked Alice Terry in an agony, as she rose to the surface almost instantly, clear-headed and as self-possessed as was possible in such agonizing circumstances. "O Father!" she added bitterly, "have mercy on us."

Even as she uttered her prayer,—as though in answer to it,—she saw one hand make a clutch at the boat, then the other with sudden power of hope was thrown up, and gained a safe resting-place for a time over the keel of the upturned boat. Flora was safe. Alice made a clutch at Esmé, drifting past her, and helped her to the other side of the same leaning-place. Then she swam after Jeanie, who had been carried much farther away, on towards the shore certainly, but much farther down than the opposite point. When Alice caught her, she swam on with her to land, and was pulled out exhausted by the friendly, shocked young artists, who had happily just discovered the accident, and had already despatched their own young attendant and another passing boy for help.

"Can you not swim?" gasped Alice with eager entreaty, almost command in her voice, as she and Jeanie were drawn ashore. She was answered quickly by the younger—

"He cannot, unhappily; but I can. Never fear; we will save them, please God."

He was sitting on the beach as he spoke pulling

off his boots. His coat was off already, and the next moment he was on his way to the rescue with what speed a Londoner can use.

He swam to Esmé, rested his arm for a minute's breathing space beside her on the keel, and then said eagerly, "I will take you now. Don't fear."

"No, not me. Take her," gasped Esmé, with a sudden strange tone of command. "This is my fault; how could I live if she did not? Tell my—tell them it was my fault. Take her now."

And the boy did her bidding. Strange as it may sound, he did it the more readily for the fact that he would so much rather have risked his life on her own behalf. That seemed, to his own hidden consciousness, to bring an element of selfishness into his acts to be beaten down in the face of the present peril.

Withdrawing his arm from its resting-place, he struck out again, and swam round the boat to where Flora clung, faint with fear for her friend, and with closed eyes praying for her. He had felt for something by which to hold her, and fastened his fingers in her belt, and swum with her two strokes away from the boat, before she was aware what was happening. A cry of the deepest pain escaped her when she caught sight of Esmé still clinging to her insecure support, and found herself being carried towards the shore.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as well as the spray

would let her, and her exhaustion, "you have brought away the wrong one of us; you should have saved her."

"Please God, I will save both," answered the boy shortly, "if you are quiet; if not, most probably we shall all be drowned."

Flora kept quiet enough after that. Even in that supreme moment she could remember not to add to the lad's own self-sought and generous peril. But it was a long swim for one out of practice, even unimpeded; and burdened as he now was, other hands had to pull both him and Flora out of the water when he reached the shore, for his strength was all spent; and as he lay panting on the beach, he could only wring his hands, as others were doing, at sight of that distant golden hair, still for a few short moments more streaming on the wind. Jeanie was crying bitterly. Alice had struggled up to her knees, and was striving, as others have done before her, to force will to supply the want of bodily strength. As it was, even without the strength, she would have thrown herself back into the sea to make the vain attempt to succour Esmé, had not the elder of the two artists forcibly prevented the useless sacrifice of life.

In her misery the poor girl turned upon him with an unconsciousness of anger and contempt in her voice, as she exclaimed—

"Then go yourself to her rescue. Why do you

not? Not swim, indeed, and you a man! That must be false."

"It is true," came the low, bitter answer; "but I could drown for her, and would to satisfy you, if—it would not be a crime."

In an after day Alice Terry was sorry for having wrung such words from a fellow-creature, but now she had no room in either heart or mind for more than the one sorrow—the absorbing sorrow for that rosebud, childlike girl with the crown of golden hair out yonder, alone in the midst of the waters awaiting death.

Whatever the apparently doomed girl might be suffering during those awful minutes, her agony could not well be so great as those who stood there, bound by their terrible impotence, watching for the final moment when she should sink out of life before their eyes.

"Will those boys never return!" sobbed Jeanie as she wrung her hands despairingly after a long, strained gaze up the shore and down the shore in vain search for their messengers. The only thing she saw was a cart coming along in the distance. The elder of the young men saw that also, and rushed to meet it, startling the driver greatly when he came up with him with the singular question—

"Can you swim?"

"Na," ejaculated the astonished man, "I canna swim, man; but what's——"

"Then," interrupted his interrogator sharply, "drive on for life and death to the hotel, and bring back those who can, and a doctor, if there be one there. There is a lady drowning. I cannot swim."

And so he turned away, flying back to his former post as a wild cry burst from those four whom he had left on the bank, "A boat! a boat!"

Yes; there was a boat at last, with two strong rowers in it, rowing with a will to the rescue. One of the young messengers had accomplished his mission.

"She will be saved!" cried Jeanie, panting, and stretching out her hands, as though she would pull the boat forward in its onward course. "Oh, she will be saved!" she added, as she sank trembling on her knees.

All with her had been watching the oncoming boat—all with her echoed her exclamation, "She will be"——

There they stopped.

Had they all been struck dumb? nay, rather, it might be asked, struck dead, even with the words on their lips? So sudden, so utter was the silence that broke short the rejoicing shout.

The boat was being rowed onwards, it was true, rapidly, steadily, resolutely, towards the point that had so long been watched. But what did these watchers now care where it was being rowed, or how!

It was being carried forwards towards an upturned boat with a bare black keel, lying deserted in the waters. The round young arm and the golden hair that had beautified it were gone.

What was it now but a coffin of dead hope ?

Was young Jeanie dead too? She lay white and motionless on the sand, and her sister idly, dumbly wondered whether this second stroke made her numb grief any greater than it was before.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LET US PRAY."

WHILE Flora Campbell looked down in a sort of stupor at her young sister, lying in a swoon at her feet, Alice Terry plucked back her lost strength with a gasping cry, as though it were her very life itself she had thus snatched back. She stood up, and, with the young artists, followed every stroke of the rowers, straining her eyes till it seemed as though they must start from their sockets in the effort to follow even the rowers' looks.

At last one of the men shipped his oar, and made a sudden stoop over the boat's side. The other man threw his weight over to the other side, resting on his comrade's movements. There was a pause. The hearts of those on shore stood still, then began to beat again with great, heavy, sounding throbs.

Something was being drawn up out of the water. Once, in his eagerness to get the something out quickly, the man nearly followed the unhappy example already set him that day, and tilted the boat

over. Happily his friend was both watchful and ready, and righted the small craft in the nick of time by almost balancing himself overboard. Alice closed her eyes with a feeling of deadly faintness. When she reopened them, the boat was being rowed towards her swiftly, and the men were shouting something which she was too dizzy to understand, or not learned enough in their dialect to comprehend.

They drew nearer, and joined signs to shouting, and then the elder of the artists answered the instructions by hastily pulling off his coat and laying it on the sand, and in it, a couple of minutes later, was folded tenderly by those rough young sailors, Donald and Davie Menzies, their fair, fragile, lifeless spoils from the sea.

"Shall we carry it up tae hame?" muttered Donald huskily, and not addressing his drearily significant question to any one in particular. But it did not matter, for he would have stood no better chance for answer, probably, if he had taken the pains to single out any one in particular to speak to. Alice had become his rival in claiming attention, and a successful one.

She had witnessed the folding of that something, which the young fishermen had lifted out of their boat, with the same wild stare with which she had before watched their rowing. But it was scarcely completed when she caught sight of the

sunlight on a stray tress of the soaked and tumbled golden hair lying at her feet, and with a sudden awaking, and revulsion of feeling, she flung herself on her knees beside the lifeless form of her friend, tore away the coat again from over the pallid wet face, and exclaimed sharply and shrilly—

"What are you all about, then? Help me to recover her."

"Her's past that, leddy," murmured Davie with a choked voice.

"We will know that, one way or the other, by midnight," came the answer between clenched teeth, and so hoarse and harsh that even benumbed Flora began to arouse to returning perception of her drear surroundings, and to the power of wonder at the American face and voice.

"By midnight!" she repeated with a burst of tears. "O Alice! it seems to me that God has brought unending midnight on us now."

Alice looked up one instant from the body, which she was already rolling gently to and fro. "Flora, pray to God. Do not reproach Him. He may yet show mercy on us."

Flora knelt beside Alice. "I know, oh! I know that He is merciful," she murmured with quivering lips; "but, Alice, how will her mother be able to feel that?"

"Well enough," came the short reply; "if before she learns there has been sad news she hears that

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in the sleep there's nae mair wakin frae my puir, dear bairns," said Ailsa Menzies and with the great, heavy tears dropping from her eyes, as she bent over the lovely, white, dead child that looked more than ever like a child's in deathly peace. That deathly calm only lasted for some hours when the poor mother thus wept over it.

"Puir bairns," she repeated with earnestness, "it's ower true that we hae dune a' that can be dune, an' a' has been nae guid. We cannae leave the puir, wee lassie, the noo, at her home awa then, ma bairns."

Campbell made no attempt to come away. He showed no sign even of having heard the mother's words.

The American girl lifted herself up for a moment, and turned a white, set face to the dead man. It looked carved in stone as the words came in a level, monotonous tone, that itself was void of life—

"I have read of a man who was recovered at the end of eight hours. When we have fought for eight hours you may advise us to give up our efforts—not before."

A flush came on to the doctor's face, and he turned back from the door. "Yes," he said, "you are right. There have been one or two cases of such marvellous resuscitation, but they are very rare."

the good has conquered. You have given up hope like these others. I shall not give up hope before midnight, if, ere that, hope has not changed into glad certainty. Some have not been brought back to consciousness, I have read, until after eight hours of ceaseless efforts. We too will continue ceaseless efforts for eight hours if there is the need for them."

"That God may bless your steadfastness!" murmured Flora, as she turned to bestow a grateful glance on the fishermen, who were busying themselves with restoring Jeanie from her fainting fit.

Their task was but partially accomplished when the messenger cart dashed back, stopped on the road above them, and a gentleman sprang out and joined the dismal group on the sands. The artists he despatched to walk to their own tent, the walk would be the best thing for the young swimmer in his wet garments. The doctor would have fain ordered Flora and Alice to undergo the same regimen, but they refused determinedly, and accordingly, with the fishermen's assistance, all were lifted into the cart, the lifeless form of Esmé Wilson lying across her friend's knees, who ceaselessly chafed her hands, while the stranger doctor gave what comfort he could in the information that messengers had been sent to Mrs. Menzies to have fires, and all in readiness for them.

"She's in the sleep there's nae mair wakin frae on earth, my puir, dear bairns," said Ailsa Menzies huskily, and with the great, heavy tears dropping from her eyes, as she bent over the lovely, white, still face, that looked more than ever like a child's in its present deathly peace. That deathly calm had already lasted for some hours when the poor landlady thus wept over it.

"My puir bairns," she repeated with earnest compassion, "it's ower true that we hae dune a' there's to be dune, an' a' has been nae guid. We maun e'en leave the puir, wee lassie, the noo, at peace. Come awa then, ma bairns."

Flora Campbell made no attempt to come away. She showed no sign even of having heard the injunction. The American girl lifted herself up for one moment, and turned a white, set face to the Scotchwoman. It looked carved in stone as the dry lips said in a level, monotonous tone, that itself seemed devoid of life—

"We have read of a man who was recovered at the end of eight hours. When we have fought with death for eight hours you may advise us to cease our efforts—not before."

A slight flush came on to the doctor's face, and he came back from the door. "Yes," he said slowly, "you are right. There have been one or two recorded cases of such marvellous resuscitation. But they are very rare."

"Patience and sustained hope are very rare, or they might be multiplied," came the harsh, level voice through those dry lips once more.

And the doctor resumed his efforts with Esmé's lifeless body against his own convictions.

"It is almost wicked of me," he muttered hoarsely, "to help you like this to keep alive false hopes. The instances of which you have read have not had reference to sufferers of this delicate, sensitive organisation."

"Oh, don't!" almost shrieked Flora, for once roused out of the gentleness usual to one so truly adorned with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. "Don't speak," she added, as if the words were wrung from her. "Do something for her mother's sake, her poor father's sake, to bring her back to life, but don't talk. I cannot bear it."

And in silence, with set faces, the work went on, the almost hopeless labour of striving to breathe back breath into those exhausted lungs, to rub back the warmth of vitality into that chilled body, only three short hours ago so full of vigorous, youthful life.

Another half-hour struck, and still coldness, stiffness, stillness, and a silence in the room that might be felt. Once Mrs. Menzies went into the outer room to look at Jeanie. But the exhausted young girl still slept, unconscious of the heart-wearing warfare going on so near her.

Another half-hour struck, and as the last stroke of the hour sounded, Alice Terry suddenly raised her grey face to the doctor's. For one instant their eyes met, then they went back to the still form again, their efforts never ceasing.

Five minutes passed. Again Alice raised her eyes. This time they met Flora Campbell's, and Flora shivered from head to foot. A murmur floated through the room. Was it from a human voice? It scarcely seemed so to the doctor's ears, but for its intensity of gratitude. Only two words—"O God!"—but a whole psalm of thanksgiving could have said no more.

Still the work went on, still the watching. But Alice Terry's face no longer looked as though carved out of dull grey stone by one who knew not how to decide what expression to give his handiwork, and so had given it none. Flora Campbell no longer looked like some dumb wild animal robbed of its young, tortured and helpless in its misery. A change had come over that drowned face and form. None but those who had watched over it, and worked throughout those three terrible hours, could have told that there was any change.

"Dead, quite dead!" was the silent ejaculation of Mrs. Menzies, as she once more crept softly back to the solemn room after a second journey to Jeanie, and to her own domain.

But when Alice Terry had suddenly glanced up at the doctor, she had in that startled moment become conscious of some change. When Flora Campbell shivered with that strange, strong revulsion of feeling, she also had become conscious of a change. Whether of colour, tension, or temperature, she could not have told, so faint, so subtle was the difference. But while the pitying Scotchwoman uttered her silent moan, those three with her in that hushed room knew that there was a fifth living fellow-creature present with them, and the cry breathed by one pair of lips went up from all the hearts—"O God!"

Still the work went on. And then—was it a sound born of their own longing, of their own imaginations? Was it a spirit murmur of compassion for their wasted hopes, and their coming deeper sorrow? or did that mist of a sigh, so faint was it, so almost inaudible, come through those half-open lips?

More gently now the doctor continued his labour. Then another light sigh. This time Mrs. Menzies heard it, and clapped her hands tightly over her own mouth to keep in the exclamation that had almost broken out. There was no doubt this time whence the sigh had come, for the white lips had quivered in its utterance. Another followed, so inexpressibly sad, as of a sick child waking up to renewed consciousness of suffering, that the tears

rushed to Alice's eyes as relief against overmuch sudden gladness.

"Your trust has been rewarded," said the doctor with grave tenderness. "Your friend will live. You have taught me a lesson that I hope never to forget, and God has blessed your noble self-repression."

CHAPTER XXV.

HER LONDON HOME.

To go back a couple of days in our history, and for a few hours to change the scene from Scotland to England, to the breakfast-room of a handsome house at Kensington.

At a well-appointed meal three persons are seated, two ladies and a gentleman, evidently father and mother and their daughter, and all far more intently engaged with their letters than with their fragrant cups of coffee, or the rolls and bacon before them.

One glance at the mother would have straightway carried the thoughts of any one to Scotland, who had lately seen Esmé Wilson, for the likeness was wonderfully great between the sweet, bright-eyed lady at the head of that London breakfast table, and the pouting, bright-eyed young damsel at the ramshackle little lodging in the Western Highlands, although the elder lady had outgrown the pout, if she ever had it. But she had not yet outlived her golden-hued hair, nor the brightness

of the dark-fringed blue eyes, and the August sun was now transforming the hair into a gold glory about her head such as Fra Angelico loved, and the blue eyes were raised with a smile in them as joyous as could shine in those of the young girl herself.

"O Harold!" she said cheerfully to her husband across the table, "how very happy our Esmé appears to be, and what a high respect she is learning for Miss Campbell's womanliness and unselfishness, and for Miss Terry's active energy and gay thoughtfulness. How thankful I am that we let her go! It may prove the turning-point in her young life."

"It is time that something was, then, I am sure," said a sharp voice at the side of the table; "for certainly up to the present time Esmé has been about the most indolent and selfish girl I know."

"Then you must know very few, and those exceptional ones," said her father, rather sternly.

Her mother answered with more soothing gentleness, "Not selfish, Elinor dear. Thoughtless, I grant you; and for that we, I fear, and all those who have been about her from her infancy, are to blame more than her natural disposition; but in her heart she is not selfish."

Elinor shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She had a thin-lipped, self-satisfied mouth. There was

no danger of her expressing annoyance with a pout, certainly ; she scowled instead. But just now, as the scowl was beginning to make its appearance, she happened to drop her eyes to an open letter lying beside her plate, and she suddenly recollected that she could not afford to indulge in wrathful or unamiable looks that minute.

Esmé was not the only one of the two sisters who liked pleasure-trips, and there was a prospect before Elinor now of a particularly enjoyable one, if only she could coax her parents into accepting the invitation to join it. She knew well enough that sharp speeches against Esmé would do more, with her father at any rate, than anything else to militate against her desires.

A friend of her father's had called yesterday, and put the whole small family into a flutter of excitement. The friend was the owner of a splendid yacht, and he had called to offer the berths on board, given up by members of his own family at the eleventh hour, to Mr. and Mrs. Wilson and their daughter.

"But give me at least a little time to think over matters and to decide," Mr. Wilson had said laughing, when his friend pressed for an answer.

"How can I give you time," was the equally laughing answer, "when I tell you, Wilson, that we are to start the day after to-morrow at twelve

noon, sharp, from Southampton? Now, if the ladies"—with a smiling bow at Mrs. Wilson and Elinor—"had asked for a little time for preparation, I might have understood it, or at any rate my wife would. But for you, old fellow!—nonsense! Say 'yes' and have done with it. We are only going to be away a fortnight, and you have no 'House' duties to plead as excuse for doubtfulness; and if you had, you could have got a pair, as I did three weeks ago, before the end of the session, for the regatta."

"Oh, of course," was the smiling retort. "With you yacht-owners a regatta must necessarily take precedence of everything; but you see I don't own a yacht."

"No, but you'll come and sail in one like a good fellow, to please me; so that's settled, I hope. And now, good-bye, for I've a hundred and one things to see to before I run down to the 'Sylvia' to-morrow."

However, to Elinor's vexation, her father would not have the affair settled in this offhand manner, and Mr. Rhodes had to leave, with the promise only that he should know the decision by half-past ten the next day.

"There are a good many things to be thought of," said Mr. Wilson, turning back into the drawing-room to his wife and daughter after bidding his friend adieu, "before running away from

home after this fashion. There is Esmé, to begin with "——

"Oh, of course; it's always Esmé to stand in the way of everything," muttered Elinor angrily as her father left the room. She did not quite wish him to hear the speech. Her mother answered it with gentle reproachfulness.

"Elinor, my child, why will you so sadly persist in dividing the interests of yourself and your sister? We love you both, we care for you both, we think for you both."

"Yes, no doubt, but not equally."

"Quite equally," was the grave, firm answer. "But Esmé wins more outward show of tenderness by her own more winning ways. And besides, my dear, you can scarcely wonder that she obtains some of the privileges of the younger, when you take such very good care to claim the rights and authority of the elder. If you claimed rather less you might obtain more, and, at any rate, you would better adorn the religion you profess. You can scarcely be surprised that Esmé learns little from your example of self-denial in some things, when she finds you persist in annoying her about such trifles as when to put the milk to her coffee, or assuming to yourself little acts of kindness she has begun, from time to time, to perform for your father."

"She has never carried them on."

"For the very good reason that while she attended

to them you have never done anything but find fault with them, ridicule them, or throw contempt on them. She is not proof against that kind of treatment. It breaks down her courage, wears away her confidence, and she ceases her efforts. Then, after a time, you come forward, take up her dropped ideas, and claim credit for your thoughtfulness, your energy, and perseverance. My daughter, do you think that He who sees the secrets of the heart sees that which pleases Him?"

Elinor blushed deeply. One person had, at any rate, seen more clearly than she had supposed. She turned away, and soon after left the room, and mounted to her own for private meditation over many thoughts.

Elinor Wilson had many good dispositions. She was clever, quick, active. Ready to do almost anything under the sun for the sake of proving her cleverness, quickness, and activity, or for those who openly and amply gave her credit for those qualities, even at the expense of considerable personal trouble, discomfort, and fatigue. But as a Christian character she was spoiled utterly by her own intense self-love, self-admiration. She did not believe that she could do wrong, that she could deserve blame. From the time of her childhood upwards, those who were angry with her, annoyed with her, out of temper with her, from her father downwards, were always the ones who were in the wrong. The blame never

belonged to her, excepting, perhaps, in the case of her sister Esmé, that she had ever condescended to have anything to do with her. It might be scarcely too much to say that no one had ever heard her say she was sorry for act, or word, or look. Perfect people of course can do no wrong; and as far as appeared outwardly, Elinor Wilson not only considered herself infinitely quicker-witted, wiser, and better than other people, but infinitely too good to need improvement, to need alteration, or to deserve criticism or reproof from her inferior fellow-creatures, whose faults she had a knack of pointing out to other people, while she personally retained their affection or admiration by her own acts of helpfulness or civility.

Her mother's words had struck her to the quick, and astonished her — angered her, possibly, somewhat also. For, to do her justice, it must be said that she was quite as anxious to keep her own good opinion of herself, as to win that of others. She had measured herself by herself so long, that she had come to believe in herself, and she did not like to have that belief shaken.

However, to return to the next day's breakfast-table. When Mr. Wilson bade his daughter good-night, some hours after Mr. Rhodes's visit, he told her that he was still uncertain as to the answer he should give in the morning to the invitation.

But to reassure her somewhat Mrs. Wilson had whispered—

“Cheer up, daughter dear. Your father has arranged matters for leaving home for the trip. Our only hesitation now is on Esmé’s account. You must admit yourself, Elinor dear,” she added, “that we cannot go off like this for a fortnight, out of the reach of post-offices, without letting her know of our movements. And those of herself and her companions are necessarily so erratic, that unless we have news to-morrow of where a letter will probably find her, we certainly shall not feel comfortable in going away. Besides, it is already three days since we have heard from her. Who dare say that none of the party has met with any mishap in their climbings and wanderings? They may be on their homeward route, for all we know. But if we have good news to-morrow, then you may make your mind easy that we also shall set off on our excursion.”

And the morning’s post did bring the news, and up to the required mark of goodness. To make up for past remissness, both father and mother had a separate letter to themselves, and both were brimming over with life and health and good spirits, with here and there a touch of something deeper in tone than had ever before been noticeable in the young girl’s very girlish epistles.

To Elinor’s additional satisfaction, there was no

hint of a present return home. To have had her sister with her on board the yacht would have taken away the greater part of her pleasure, although the air would have been as fresh, and the sea as exhilarating. Some one might have observed how bright the sea-breezes made the roses in Esmé's cheeks, how beautiful the golden hair looked crisping in the wind. And she would have had to share attention with her, at any rate, which would have been a quite sufficient fact to spoil Elinor's enjoyment. But now, everything went well, in accordance with Miss Wilson's desires. She had received by that post a most ardently friendly letter from Sylvia Rhodes, expressing her delight in the prospect of having her "clever, cheerful Elinor with us on board our dear little floating prison. Mind, whatever you do or leave undone for the rest of your life, that you persuade your father and mother into coming."

Fortunately for Elinor's feelings just then, she was not called upon to exercise her powers of persuasion. Her absent sister's joyous letters settled the matter. While one daughter was enjoying herself so very much, the parents' sense of fairness, as well as their affection, made them anxious that their other child also should have this offered pleasure. Besides, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were themselves as fond of the sea as their children,

and they had a great partiality for the society of their genial friends the Rhodes's.

"You may get out your yachting costume, Elinor, my dear," said her father cheerfully, as he finished reading Esmé's letter to her mother, as well as the one to himself. "As this young scaramouche has chosen to run away from us, I begin to agree with you that we may as well run away from her, and let her see that she is not the only individual able to find enjoyment away from her belongings."

Even before he rose from the breakfast-table, Mr. Wilson wrote his letter of acceptance to Mr. Rhodes; and when Elinor saw it actually carried away by the man-servant to be delivered immediately by hand, she felt that she might breathe freely once more, and really do as her father suggested as to the bringing forth of her serges.

It may be mentioned in passing, that both Mrs. Wilson and her daughter arranged to do a considerable amount of shopping that day before luncheon, which resulted in the appearance, at ten o'clock that night, of bran new costumes suitable for seafaring ladies, and warranted to look neat even with the roughest wear. A good deal of packing was also got through, together, for Mrs. Wilson, with sundry household arrangements, and for Elinor, with the hasty despatch of sundry short notes to various friends and acquaintances explaining the forthcoming absence and silence.

Mr. Wilson took upon himself the office of writing to Esmé, both to answer her letters, and to tell of the unexpected way in which they were about to follow her holiday-making example. Thus it came to pass that by this division of duties the rapid preparations were completed, and the following morning the small family party made a much hastier, earlier breakfast than usual, sent off their luggage in a cab, entered their carriage themselves, and drove off to the Waterloo Station, caught the 9.5 express train to Southampton, and went on board the yacht just about the same time that poor little Esmé prevailed upon her friends to embark on Scotch waters in the little rowing-boat.

How little parents or daughter thought of how near death one of that family of four would be while the yacht was still pursuing her gay, smooth course down Southampton water! How differently the cheerful voices of their friends would have sounded in the parents' ears, how differently the fair scenes around them would have looked to their eyes, could they, during these terrible minutes, have heard the cry of that beloved young voice—

“No, not me. Take her. Tell my—tell them it was my fault.”

Mr. Rhodes was pointing out the beautiful lines of the Isle of Wight coast. Mr. Wilson, with his head thrown back with the air of a man who is thoroughly relishing a well-earned rest, was smil-

ingly listening to his friend's remarks. And the while, a few hundred miles away, a slight girlish form was growing chill with the chill of death in the water; soft round arms and hands were clinging for life to the treacherously slippery keel of an up-turned boat, and a wealth of wet golden hair was drawn back by the wind from a pair of dim blue eyes, and a white, childlike face that still bore no sign of regret for having relinquished safety for another's sake.

How well it is for us, in this world of mingled joy and pain, that we are not omniscient! How well that we do not know all that is coming forward with the future; that we cannot see all that is even passing in the present!

"All things work together for good to them that love God." But with our dim perceptions we should be conscious only of the evil.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THAT NIGHT.

"FLORA dear, what are you doing?" said Alice Terry, in a tone of tender reproach, as she came into the inner room bearing a little tray in her hand with tea and toast.

"I told you to get to bed, Flora, and indeed you should have done so. You don't know how unfit you look to sit up."

"I am going to bed directly," answered Miss Campbell. "But you know one of us must have written this letter, and you have more than enough to do for us all, as it is. O Alice! dear, brave, noble-hearted Alice! what should we have done without you?"

And with the exclamation Flora put her arm round her friend's waist, and laid her head wearily against hers. Alice put her own arm around her friend's neck with equal affection. Those hours they had spent together over Esmé Wilson, fighting with death, had drawn them more closely together than years of ordinary intimacy could have done.

"But what letter are you writing, Flora dear?" she asked after a minute's silence. "And why must it be written to-night, when you are so thoroughly worn out?"

"It is to Mrs. Wilson," was the simple answer, and Alice uttered a hasty exclamation of remembrance.

"Ah! of course they must have a letter. I had never thought of that. . Thank God, Flora, that it—it is such a dif—that it is so much easier to write than it might have been."

"Yes, Alice," murmured back Flora; "that memory and the words, 'Thank God,' keep so perpetually in my mind that they seem to have swallowed up all other thought. I scarcely know what I am writing, nor whether my letter is more sad than it should be, or too full of rejoicing not to jar on her parents, when they first read the news of what might have ended with such a heartbreak for them—which would so have ended but for your steadfast faith and strength of purpose."

"But for your prayers, I think we may rather say," whispered Alice. "But drink your tea now, Flora dear, and when you have finished your letter leave it for Esmé to direct when she wakes, or the sight of your handwriting on the envelope, instead of hers, will indeed make the reception of your letter alarming and unwelcome."

Flora lifted her head, and looked up at the brown-

tinted, brown-eyed face above her. "Alice, how comes it that you always seem to have brains to think of everything?"

"If I had," was the reply, with a little flicker of the usual smile, "I should say I supposed it came from my brain having been properly sliced up. But as I am bound to contradict your statement, I say instead, that I am afraid your remark proves that you have got a little bit of brain too much. Look at your plate. See, I have not even had thought enough to bring you any butter."

So saying, Alice quietly left the room again, coming back almost immediately with the butter, and the information at the same time—

"You will be glad to hear that Jeanie has made a first-rate tea, and is beginning to look quite herself again."

"Was Jeanie nearly drowned too, then?" came a low, weak voice from the bed, and Flora and Alice exchanged quick, half-startled glances before Alice drew aside the curtain of the bed, and leaning across it, said very tenderly—

"No, Esmé darling! But she was very sorry for you, and now she is very glad. And I am rather glad that you have awaked to take your supper. Don't speak another word, please, Queenie darling, till I bring it to you."

The soft, curved lips folded themselves in together again obediently, and the white eyelids

reclosed with tired contentment until the easily taken supper came—the yolk of an egg beaten up in a teacupful of warm milk, with a piece of sugar and a teaspoonful of brandy.

“When she wakes give her something light, and perhaps a little weak brandy-and-water,” the doctor had said on seeing her again about two hours after her restoration to consciousness. And accordingly Alice put her own ideas and the doctor’s recommendation together, and acted upon them, to the present approval of the patient, and that of her physician the next day. An egg had also been administered to Flora, beaten up in her tea, but she was too tired to be aware of the fact. She drank it up, and very soon afterwards was ready for bed.

“But what are you going to do, Alice?” she asked, as she laid her head with a sigh of thankfulness on the pillow. “I ought to have put you to bed before myself.”

“Very like a whale!” whispered Alice impudently, but the quivering of her lips belied the attempted tone of mischievousness, and as she tucked her friend up comfortably she added with another manner—“Never fear, dear! I shall take good care of myself, and meantime my whole heart seems to be one great, bounding song of thanksgiving. The trouble has been good, for this wonderful joy that follows.”

Exhausted as she was, Flora Campbell would certainly not have let herself drop so contentedly asleep as she did, scarcely a minute after Alice left her bedside, had she known how that friend was really going to spend the night, what she really was going to do with herself.

"Have something to eat and drink, say her prayers, put out the light, and then pop into bed beside Jeanie," was the programme that her sleepy mind naturally drew out for that fourth member of the hardly tried party. But the programme as drawn out by that individual herself ran differently, widely differently, as regarded the latter half.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"HOW MANY CANDLES TO THE POUND!"

ALICE TERRY'S first proceeding on returning to the outer room was to go to the little corner cupboard, and give the candle-paper therein an inquisitive pinch.

Perhaps you have never, dear reader, had the buying of your packet of composites, so many to the pound (rather so few, perhaps Mons. Harpagon would prefer to have us say). The candles come, done up in stiff paper packets of a bluish grey colour, something like the clumsy rolypoly puddings which my French governess announced one day, in the bygone years, to be her "roling passion." Roly poly puddings, it should be further observed, with a very thin outside layer of crust, through which has permeated the black currant jam of the interior, discolouring its whiteness. Well, you get one of these packets when you are housekeeping on your own account, and you open one end of it, and, to the imbuing of one's fingers with that especially distasteful smell and feeling of greasiness, you pull

out one of the tightly packed portions of the roly-poly, which, from its stiffness, treacherously retains its original appearance. In that condition you put it by in your one small housekeeping cupboard, with your bread and butter and marmalade, and the second cake of carbolic soap, and your tea and sugar and apples, and matches and ink and biscuits ; and anything else that needs, for tidiness' sake, to be kept in that one all-sorts village-shop kind of a cupboard.

When that first candle of the packet is used up, you get out another, and so on another as you require it, generally fishing it out of its stiff paper barrel in the dark. And of course you never think of counting how many there were to begin with, nor of remembering how many you have used. At least you never do, with reference to your first packet, think of counting how many "to the pound" you have got ; and when you ever do for the future, what is the good ? for you still always forget when you have used the last but one, and, still worse, the last. You get out that last one in the dark at night, without knowing that it is the last, and in the morning there is nothing in the stiff rolypoly paper to proclaim its empty worthlessness.

All these reflections, and indeed ever so many more, came into the mind of Alice Terry when she went to that corner cupboard of the "shanty," and, before putting her fingers inside the paper sheath,

gave it a preliminary pinch. Pinch the first she felt nothing. Umph! Pinch two; still utter collapse. Pinch three, or rather sudden sharp squeeze up of the whole affair between her two hands, and as sudden a sharp qualm of disappointment, a sinking of the heart. She opened the thin paper sandwich and looked inside, with a sort of dim idea that perhaps candles were more conspicuous to sight than touch, like their flames. But look as she would, feel as she would, no candle was to be either felt or seen inside that aggravating wrapper.

With a sharp little movement of anger, due in no small measure to the day's excitement, Alice tore the provokingly deceptive paper in halves, and threw it back on the floor of the cupboard. Then she examined the candles burning in the two rooms, and softly extinguished that in the inner room, leaving the door wide open, so that Esmé should not open her eyes on total darkness if she woke, and possibly imagine herself once more beneath the waves, as poor Jeanie had done a couple of hours ago, when she roused out of her first sleep, soon after the fires had gone out and Alice had taken away the light.

"Two pudding-ends to choke a dog," muttered Miss Terry grimly, still examining her two bits of candle. "I wonder whatever that intensely ridiculous proverb can mean! I only hope these two candle-ends will choke to-night's darkness; but it's no good hoping, for they can't. It won't be light

before five, and these pieces cannot last much more than a couple of hours."

Miss Terry consulted her watch. "Scarcely twelve now—two o'clock when they go out. Three hours to sit and twiddle my thumbs in the darkness, and worry myself into fifty rages against that candle paper, lest any of them wake up frightened."

While thus growling, the young lady's eyes fell on the bread, and a bright thought struck her. While ministering to the others she had paid no thought to her own wants, and she suddenly remembered that she was very hungry and thirsty indeed, and the best thing she could begin by doing was to make herself as comfortable a meal as circumstances would allow.

"And it shall be very comfortable," she murmured with a smile of returning satisfaction. "Eggs boiled just to the very turn; tea hot and strong, and plenty of it; bread with an extravagant thickness of butter on it, and marmalade to finish up with. To top up with, I think I might be allowed to say, just for this once."

How all this had anything to do with the small candle supply may for the moment seem mysterious, but it was soon explained. On one of the shelves of the cupboard stood Esmé's travelling Etna, spirit lamp, spirits of wine, fitted cup, all complete within the bronze goblet case.

In a minute Alice had rearranged the white

cloth on the table, put away the slice of cold, clung toast, ladled the cold tea-leaves out of the teapot with a teaspoon, and thrown them on the top of the ashes in the grate. Then she lighted the spirit-lamp, and blew out the candle with an ever-brightening smile, for all her charges were sleeping comfortably, and the next half-hour, at any rate, of her self-imposed watch over them promised to be much more agreeable than she had anticipated, although the illumination afforded by a minute Etna is not great.

"But at any rate it prevents the place being quite in darkness," was Alice's contented ejaculation; "and it is quite enough to cut bread-and-butter by, and to find the way to my mouth."

As long as the spirits of wine lasted Alice sat in the rocking-chair, enjoying her sorely-needed meal and rest, notwithstanding that now and again a strong shiver would pass through her whole frame, convulsing her from top to toe, as the terrible thought came to her of what might have been—how that inner room might have been occupied, with what agonized dread she might have been expecting the waking of the bereaved young sister beside her, the arrival of the bereaved parents. As these moments came to her her face sank forward into her hands, with that oft-reiterated low cry, "O my God!"—a cry of mingled awe and thanksgiving.

On one of these occasions the lamp died out, and,

overcome by fatigue, Alice Terry fell into a few moments' doze. She was startled out of it by the sound of a voice from the next room, firm, and soft, and distinct.

"No, no, I am not afraid to die. Do not mind for me, mother darling. The water is not as terrible as you suppose. And oh! it is so good of God to have let me do one thing at the end that is not selfish. It shows that He does love me, mother darling; and I love Him."

Hurriedly Alice lighted the candle and flew into the next room. Both its occupants were sitting up in bed, Flora trying to regain her drowsy senses, having been awakened by the voice beside her, and Esmé Wilson looking straight before her, with an unconscious, wide-eyed gaze of the blue eyes that took no more apparent heed of the light, than they had done of the darkness. She showed no more consciousness either of her companions, or of their voices when they spoke to her, still continuing, with accents of gentle, soothing affection, to address her parents, whom she evidently supposed to be standing by witnessing her drowning.

It was owing to a hint of the doctor's, relative to the possibility of some such incident of this sort occurring during the night, that Alice Terry had decided to sit up till the morning. Nevertheless, in spite of preparation, it was no slight additional shock to her nerves, and she was very thankful

when she had at length soothed the beloved young queen of the party back to quiet slumber.

"I ought to have watched her, and not to have gone to sleep," murmured Flora with keen self-reproach.

"And to have made yourself ill, for us all to have to nurse you," whispered back Alice, gently pushing her also back again on to her pillow. "You forget that you were three times as long in the water as I was, and without the stimulus of swimming. Good-night again, dear; go to sleep, please, as fast as you can. I expect Esmé will be all right in the morning; but it will not do to remind her too vividly of her late adventure by the sight of a set of pale, dismal-looking faces."

Miss Terry smiled brightly as she turned away from her friend; but she was no longer smiling when she gained the shelter of the outer room with a fast-expiring candle in her hand. That one of her two remnants had not lasted even as long as she had reckoned upon.

"And, of course," she remarked with practical philosophy, "of course the other will not either. And just when I have discovered more than ever the true necessity for light."

She dropped on her knees by the bedside, and hid her anxious face in prayer. Had it not been for the candle, by means of which Alice and Flora had by gentle degrees brought Esmé to recognise

them as her two schoolfellows, to recognise the room, already grown familiar to her, and its books and furniture, in all probability she would have been still drowning to her own perception, openly discoursing of her imaginary dying, to the heart-breaking distress of her friends and to her own great injury. And in all likelihood, an hour or two hence, she would wake again in the same weak, wandering state.

"And I shall not be able to wake her out of it, and all for want of a bit of candle," moaned Alice.

"A silly thing to moan about," most likely some of you exclaim. But then, you see, you are not Alice Terry. And very likely one of your virtues is patience, whereas Alice Terry possessed most of the virtues except patience. To be up and doing was easy enough to her. While actively engaged she was quite equal to keeping "a heart for any fate." But it was horribly hard to her to wait in hope, to wait in fear, to wait any way, in fact, as Mrs. Menzies found out the first hour of their acquaintance. The thought of sitting with folded hands for a couple of hours in the dark, waiting for the possibility of Esmé or Jeanie starting up in a state of quivering alarm, from which she might find it impossible, under the circumstances, to relieve them, put her own nerves into a state of trying excitement.

She sat on the floor, with her hands clasped

round her drawn-up knees, staring at the second dwindling candle. It is bad enough to watch a fast dying-out candle when you know that an excursion down among cold stones, oilcloth, darkness, and blackbeetles will be necessary before you can get another one, but it is much worse when you know that another one is altogether out of reach. Moreover, if there be a trouble or annoyance of any kind in your mind or heart, you will find the hours between twelve and four of the dark new day a splendid time for magnifying it.

I don't advise you to try the experiment. It is as uncomfortable a one as those scientific men sometimes try on themselves, for the ultimate benefit of their fellow-creatures. But at the same time, you will find I am right if you do try it. Agitate over a worry or grief between the dim, chill hours of twelve and four, and you will find it increase in a most extraordinary manner—ten-fold, a thousand-fold, a million-fold—grow more speedily than a mushroom, spring from a molehill to a mountain by sheer force of the expansive power of night's grim, fierce breath. Alice found her candle trouble growing minute by minute greater to her, and harder to bear. The rooms appeared to grow minute by minute smaller, the air in them hotter and more confined; either that the atmosphere really was heavy from some hours of large fires and hot bottles, or that the American

girl's impatient excitement oppressed her, minute by minute her breath came more heavily; and most certainly minute by minute the candle grew shorter.

Miss Terry rose to her feet at last, softly but hastily. With one swift, keen glance towards Jeanie Campbell, she stepped across to the outer door, softly drew back the bolt, turned the key, and passed out into the dark yard. She lifted her head to the dim, purple sky, and opened her mouth for the double purpose of giving vent to a long-drawn thankful sigh, and of drawing in the fresh air.

No little to her dismay the sigh was echoed, and within a couple of feet of her. She wished herself safe inside the barred door again. But wishes, as we were told in nursery days, are not horses, consequently neither do beggars ride, nor people find themselves conveyed by them where they want to be. And the queer thing is, that the more vigorously one wishes to be anywhere but where one is, so much the more difficult is it, very often, to stir.

To Alice Terry's mind that sighing echo of herself sounded very disagreeably uncanny. She was not at all superstitious, but she was rather poetical and imaginative, and that sigh so close beside her brought to her mind all the stories she had ever heard, or read, of Scotch fays or Irish banshees. If the sigh were uttered by a midnight human

prowler, that certainly did not make the matter pleasanter.

Horrible moment of powerlessness, followed by an equally horrible moment of indecision, whether to stay where she was and be killed, or to retreat upon her friends, followed by the midnight robber, and all be killed together.

Two horrible moments, when thought was terribly swift, outrunning reason, and time was so slow, but not slow enough for reason to overtake it.

If more moments had followed those two horrible ones, more and equally horrible, there is no saying what proofs of lofty heroism the eighteen years old Yankee might not have given. But, as it happened, she was able to reserve her store of possibly probable heroism for another time.

"Reckon mither 'd clout me sair if she knew I were oot here."

That was the second sound that broke the mysterious night stillness of the dark yard, and the third sound was an hysterical burst of laughter from the hearer, checked as quickly as uttered, to give way to the half-sobbing, half-laughing words—

"Clout you indeed, Jamie, would she! And I guess that I think it would serve you very well right if she did. Do you know that you have scared me as badly as if you had been the very ghost of Goatfell himself?"

"Is there ane?" came the eager whisper.

"Not knowing, can't say," was the low answer. Then, "Nonsense, you shameful big baby, Jamie. I told you yesterday you must leave off believing in babies' tales. But you did frighten me dreadfully just now, all the same. I thought you were at the very least a smuggler, bent on carrying us all off as slaves to the coast of Barbary."

"Whaur's that? Anigh the country ye come frae?"

"Not particularly."

"Oh!" in an accent of disappointment. "If 'twere, I'd no mind bein' carried there."

Alice Terry laid her hand on the boy's shoulder in acknowledgment of the frank, unconscious compliment. "But tell me, Jamie," she said after an instant's silence, "what brings you out into the yard at this time of night, and over at our side of it? You have no business here, you know."

"Maybe sae," came the sturdy answer. "An' ye may clout me, and mither may clout me, if the tane or the baith o' ye will, for my comin. But I'm glad I cam, and I'd come again if I'd the same cause, for I cam to look after ye."

"To look after me!" ejaculated Alice between surprise and amusement. "And pray what right or reason had you, I should like to know, to look after me?"

The boy hung his head and hesitated a moment. "Jock screeched oot in 's sleep a half-hour agoe

that the bonny Yankee leddie war dead-drooned. An—an—I couldna sleep after that wi'oot comin to see were ye safe — for ye're bonny, an' ye're guid."

Tears sprang into the soft, quick brown eyes, and the girl stooped over the big, uncouth Scotch lad, and put her lips one moment to his forehead. "May God bless you, laddie," she whispered, "for your kind-heartedness. But why did you not tap at the door, or call to me to relieve your fears, instead of lingering about all this dismal long time?"

"I feared to startle ye," was the shy answer, "or to wauken ye gin ye were sleepin."

"But it was no good coming, was it, if you did not find out, after all, whether or not we were safe?"

"Maybe no," answered Jamie, rather doggedly. "But I felt better here anigh ye than yonder, and so I stayed, and should ha' stayed till morn had ye no come oot. But I'll gang awa noo, and guid nicht to ye. An' maybe ye'll no tell mither where ye fand me, for I'll be hungry the morn."

"Perhaps you would like a piece now, with some marmalade, to cheer you up again before you go back to bed?"

Whatever expression of charmed assent may have appeared on James Menzies' face was visible only to the darkness itself, but Alice, at any rate,

heard the satisfied ring in the decided, short "Aye" with which her suggestion was received, and pushing the door a little open, she bade the boy wait where he was while she fetched the bread and jam. In an instant she reappeared.

"O Jamie! you can do something for me after all, if you will—something quite important that I had forgotten about. If you will borrow me a candle from anywhere you shall have a piece of cake, as well as the bread and marmalade, when you come back."

"But ye ha' a'ready a licht in yonder," hesitated Scotch James after true Scotch fashion.

"Yes, and it's nearly burnt out," returned Alice Terry. "So be quick—there's a good boy—for my friends may be frightened if they waken in the dark, as I was just now, you remember. They may be taking me, in my turn, for the ghost of Goatfell."

"Or mair like the ghaist o' the sea," muttered Jamie, with more sharpness of wit than Alice had given him credit for.

And then he slipped across the yard with his bare feet as noiselessly as Alice could have done herself, and was back with a couple of bits of old-fashioned tallow candle as soon as the supper was ready for him.

"I'll tak this, but no t'ither piece," he said, as he put down the candle-ends just inside the door

on a chair, and took the bread and marmalade from the plate Alice held to him. She looked from the boy to the cake and back again.

"What is amiss with the cake, then," she asked at last, "that you won't have that? It is very good, I assure you."

"Aye, nae doot," was the stolid reply; "but ye offered it me tae pay me for doin' some'at for ye, and I canna tak it, nor I winna, neither."

"Take it for friendship's sake," said Alice gently.

The boy looked at it with just a touch of boy's wistfulness for a moment, then he put his free hand resolutely behind his back.

"Na, na; that wad be a kind o' cheatin mysel."

"Then take it to give to Jock."

"Na, nor that way neither," was the hasty answer. "Jock maun fetch it himsel the morn if he's to get it, for I'll nae ha' the touching o' it, and so guid-nicht till ye again."

And with that final word the lad ran off as though to escape further pressing, or temptation to act ungenerously. Alice closed the door, relocked and bolted it, and returned to her duties of watcher, feeling immensely the better for her midnight adventure, notwithstanding the alarm of its outset.

All her charges still slept; she was secured against the terrors of darkness for them if they woke, and her mind was full of grateful and happy

thoughts. Once more she seated herself in the favourite rocking-chair, with her little Bible in her hand, and in spite of the events of the last twelve hours her choice fell on the glad songs of praise of the final psalms, on the chapters of rejoicing in Isaiah, and the Revelation. And, as the first streak of the new dawn pierced through a crevice in the shutter, the girl once more sank on her knees by the bedside with this murmur on her lips: "For the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. Death is only the gate."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALICE TERRY MEDITATES.

WHAT strange things letters are! At least so they always strike me as being. Perhaps you have never hitherto allowed them to trouble your mind in this light at all. You have just sensibly written them when it came to you to have to do so, and you have popped them in their envelopes, fastened them up, stamped them, directed them, and, when they have gone through almost as many preparations as mincemeat, you have put them into the pie—no, it's the mincemeat goes into the pie, by the way; the letter goes into the post-box.

To turn from the letter-path a minute, to wander into another speculation, I wonder whether you have ever done as I used to when a child, and have often done since. Suddenly begun to think, with particular thought, about some one special word in a sentence you were about to utter; some insignificant sort of a word—"that," or "and," or "which," or "to," and so on—and one has thought and thought, with a sudden startled puzzle and

wonderment, "What does it mean? what can it mean? how is it possible that it can mean anything?" until not only that first troublesomely obtrusive word, but all other words, seem to be nothing but absurd muddle and jumblement, utterly incapable of expressing any ideas whatever, or of conveying any intelligible information.

Of course all these small mental worries are very ridiculous in one respect, but in another they are highly valuable. Considered in one way, those who indulge in them are not quite justified, perhaps, in grumbling when friends and relatives accuse them, in not the most respectful terms, of being "dreamy." Regarded in another light, such bewilderments prove an awakening from slumber, or rather a sudden change from a dark room into a light one. In the dark room, to which you are accustomed, you are not at all aware of how little you see, and so you go on calmly, quietly, sedately, too level-minded to attract any attention. You take all as you see it, in its surface aspect.

Suddenly a brilliant ray of thought, of wisdom-given wonder, of fresh intelligence, darts into your mind, and then you begin to find out knowledge. Even the very words you speak, the words that began to be lisped by the half-unconscious lips of infancy are breathings from the Divine Intelligence. The greatest of philologists can only dimly guess at the origins and absolute meanings, so to say, of

many of the words we use. To Divine Wisdom the syllables that float away on the air are as intelligible in their use as the far-flying seeds of the dandelion. Our limited comprehensions can grasp very little but shadow when we try to analyze the word "that," to try to discover how it ever came to signify anything at all. But on that small speculation our minds mount higher, and we are ready to murmur with David—

"O Lord, how wonderful are Thy works, and Thy ways past finding out!"

But now, how comes this queer parenthesis into the middle of our present tale? Of course you are asking that question in your own mind. I know as well as if I could hear you, but the answer is a good deal easier than you expect; and whether or no it is "queer," you must settle with Alice Terry, for it is her affair, not mine. I have only got to remark that it is, at any rate, no parenthesis, unless every disjointed piece of a tale has to be so designated. Miss Terry had been sitting up all night, as you know, after the boating accident. She kept her watch with faithful vigilance until the twilight dawn began to broaden and strengthen into day, and then she extinguished the final quarter of an inch of her final piece of borrowed tallow candle, wrapped a light shawl around herself, drew the rocking-chair up beside the bed upon which Jeanie was still sleeping peacefully, seated herself in it, put her feet upon a square wooden footstool,

borrowed from the kitchen across the yard one day for Esmé's benefit, and dropped herself comfortably back to indulge in drowsy meditations until any of her companions should awake.

Those drowsy meditations, after a long night of wakefulness, are a very scattered, rambling, uncertain sort of affairs. They proved so now with Alice Terry. In the first place, she remembered that letter to Mrs. Wilson, which Flora Campbell had so thoughtfully insisted on writing overnight, before consulting her own weary longings to go to bed. She thought of the unexpected shock that letter must be to the parents, who had so recently received others abounding in joyousness and fun. From thinking of one especial letter she pondered over letters in general. How they were written, why they were written, whether things ever happened so pleasantly as that the mood of the writer of a letter harmonised with the mood of the recipient at the time of reading.

"Guess they generally jar," was the muttered remark, with a half-mischievous little smile, but a touch of seriousness in the brown eyes, that opened for a minute, to gaze at a sunbeam guest that had flickered its way in through a chink in the wooden shutter.

"Some one just starting for a glorious gallop dashes off a dozen or two of hilarious lines to a friend, while waiting for the horses; and the friend receives the letter on the moment of entering the

cab which is about to take her to the dentist, to have a couple of teeth pulled out. Some one, whose cat has just made a light but *recherché* dinner of her pet canary, writes a sighing, weeping letter, which her friend receives in the same hour of learning that she has come out A1 in the final college examinations. A sort of philosophical treatise arrives while one is wondering whether any one saw the bit of the heel of one's boot come off, and a married friend sends a scribbled note for receipts for toffee, treacle-pudding, and fireplace polish, just when one's whole mind is bound up between the covers of a volume of Carlyle. "Thus it will be with Flora's letter, of course—at least, 'course!' What? What about 'course'—what does 'course' mean?"

Thus muttered Alice to herself as she lay back in the rocking-chair, her eyes dreamily open or dreamily shut. They were dreamily shut with the last ejaculations, for she had fallen quite asleep for about the space of ten seconds, and woke herself again with the extra force of accent put into the first utterance of the word "course." It was still echoing on her ears when she awoke, and, disconnected for the moment with anything else, she was wearily puzzled with its presence there on her tongue and in her ears.

"What about 'course'? What does 'course' mean?"

So far she had got in her self-questioning when memory returned to her, and her face lightened again. But the questions set her off on a new train of soliloquy. She dropped the letter consideration with a final consolatory ejaculation.

"Ah! well, luckily for my probably discording friends, I write letters next to never, so there is small chance of their coming malapropos."

She was right there, certainly. Unfortunately, her numerous friends did not appreciate her consideration so highly as perhaps they should have done. However, at that moment her mood was not to speculate upon their grievances, but upon the meaning of the word "course;" and from that her cogitations meandered on until they grew gradually almost as serious as they had been a few hours ago. And then Jeanie awoke.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALICE'S WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS.

"You won't turn us out to-day, please, Mrs. Menzies, will you?"

The question was put by Esmé Wilson, and the first answer it received was the tender smoothing of her hair by the broad hand of the worthy Scotchwoman, after the fashion of twelve days ago.

"Aweel, lassie, if I hadna the heart to gie ye the go-bye when ye cam here strangers, I'm thinkin I'd need to be made o' stane sin' syne to dae it the noo. If ye've the will tae bide, ye'll bide, that's certain, an' no the Duke himsel' wad be gettin the room frae ye, frae Ailsa Menzies."

"Thank you!" said Esmé, gratefully. "That is well then, at any rate, for I am sure none of us will wish to be on the move to-day, nor, either, to leave a friend."

Mrs. Menzies shook her head. "Friend! It's no sae much o' that Ailsa Menzies has been tae ony o' ye, my bairn; but the lot o' ye hae been

that, an' mair, to my laddies an' their father, an' I ken it well. But harken! there's the meat bell; and if ye mak' oot to bide the day ye'll be wantin something, Miss Campbell, if it's nae mair than a chicken ye'd be havin'?"

"As it is," put in Esmé, with a little smile up into Flora's questioning face.

And the real matter that brought their landlady to them being thus settled, she bustled off again and left the party to themselves. The first words that were uttered, as she drew the door half to after her, were spoken by Miss Alice Terry, and they were uttered in a tone of calm contentment.

"Then good-night, my friends."

The words and the mode of their expression startled all the three hearers out of their listlessness, as the speaker had intended. She was feeling very tired, but she did not like to go to bed until some one else of the party had touched upon the business of their intended departure that day; and when that was arranged, she did not like to leave them to settle deeper down into that sort of apathetic exhaustion which seemed to be creeping over them.

Breakfast that morning had been a pretence. Jeanie had been prepared to eat a very fair one, but when the tray, carried in to Esmé and Flora, came out again to the shanty apartment within five minutes of its preparation, with nothing on it touched but the tea, Jeanie's appetite fled also.

Alice excused herself from eating with the plea of a very late supper.

And so the things were cleared away, and Flora and Esmé got up, and, after somewhat less careful toilettes than usual, they made their way into the outer room, and dropped into a couple of chairs, rather with the air of two patient martyrs recently released from the rack, and resignedly awaiting their next turn on it. Young Jeanie was of a particularly impressible disposition, and accordingly she, of course, fell into the prevailing mood with the greatest readiness. A couple of hours ago her face had brightened with the most joyous gratitude, but now it looked as long as a new-made monk's.

When Jeanie Campbell first awoke, with the painful impression upon her of some actual or impending calamity, Alice had encouraged her to speak of yesterday's events, and had discussed them with her fully, bravely, and calmly, and had so soothed her younger companion's nerves, that at last the girl's whole heart had echoed Alice Terry's final words—

“And now, Jeanie dear, instead of looking doleful and solemn, I feel as if we ought to turn ourselves into larks, if it were only possible, that we might be able to soar heavenwards, singing the brightest songs of thanksgiving we could carol.”

That had been Alice Terry's wholesome teaching, and it had had effect until that full breakfast-tray

was brought out of the inner room, and poor Jeanie felt it incumbent on her sympathy also to leave her new-laid egg untouched. Then appeared those two low-speaking individuals from that inner room, with a sort of general air of hushedness about them, and when they sank into their seats with silent tongues and unoccupied hands, as if they had nothing left them to do but to wait for fresh calamity, Jeanie's spirit was thoroughly quenched, and her ideas as to propriety of behaviour under special circumstances stirred up into a general muddle. Alice had put Mark Twain's "Innocents Abroad" into her hands, and she had been uttering spasmodic little giggles over it for the past half-hour. Now she dropped the cleverly ridiculous book down into her lap, as though for some decided, although perfectly inscrutable reason, she ought to be ashamed of herself for having been amused with its caricatures just then. She set herself to gazing drearily through the half-open door into the yard instead, and just as Alice Terry was meditating some desperate experiment to rid herself of tiredness, and her companions of their woe-begone appearance, Mrs. Menzies made her opportune entrance upon the scene.

A furtive little smile flitted over Miss Alice's shrewd countenance when she heard Esmé's question, addressed to Mrs. Ailsa almost before she was fairly in the room; and at the same time she saw it addressed almost as earnestly and eagerly

by Miss Campbell's eyes. The two maidens were, indeed, deeply and solemnly impressed by their late peril, deeply and earnestly grateful for their deliverance. But, with the queer mixture of thoughts and feelings in weak human brains, it is almost certain that the most immediate cause of their present imposingly dreary aspect was due to the dread of having to turn out, within the course of the next two or three hours, in search of another shelter, and—still more depressing thought—that, before such obligatory turning out of themselves from that abode could be properly accomplished, a turning in of garments, and possessions of all sorts, into boxes and portmanteaus would be necessary.

"Sufficient unto the day, sufficient unto the hour, sufficient unto the minutes is the evil thereof," was a precept so thoroughly welded into Alice's character, that she was perpetually being half amused, half startled by discovering the more or less long looks ahead being always taken by Flora, and tolerably often by Esmé, although from very different points of view.

At the present minute, according to Alice Terry's notion, the one thing to be done was to make mutual exertions to recover as fast as possible from the effects of yesterday's alarm, and terrible bodily and mental strain. According to many-times tried, over-anxious Flora Campbell, the one thing that

she could not help doing was to dread the coming two or three hours' bustle and travel for her sister, and hardly recovered friend. According to poor little Esmé, the thing instinctively to do was to dread that threatened bustle and travel for herself; and so greatly did she dread it, that she took the initiative in trying to escape it.

As a fact, Mrs. Menzies was prepared for the request, for she had quite decided overnight that her young lady-lodgers would not be leaving her within the next twenty-four hours, although the room was already promised over their heads; but that was a trifle for future adjustment. Meantime she went off to inspect her poultry yard, and Alice quietly lifted herself up, with what some one has described, I believe, as "a comprehensive stretch," and said, with contented relief, "Then, good-night, my friends."

That put a stop to a threatened relapse into stagnation. Esmé lifted herself up in the rocking-chair with something of returning animation.

"Don't talk in riddles, Alice. We aren't in the humour for them. At any rate, I know I am not."

"How clever of you to be able to speak so positively about anything," said Alice, laughing. "But I am not speaking in riddles. I have pleased myself with sitting up all night, and, as I am

awfully sleepy now, I guess I am going to please myself by going to bed. Saying 'good-night,' seems to be the proper first step in the business."

"Even when it happens to be broad morning daylight?"

"Even when it happens to be broad morning daylight. When you should happen to interview me as an American specimen, mind you remember that as one of my idiosyncrasies. It is wonderfully telling, you know, to get hold of a few idiosyncrasies. Makes a variety in a biography."

"It would make rather more variety in a history of your life," retorted Esmé, "to get hold of a few commonplaces."

"Such as smut-curtained"—— began Alice, to be interrupted by Jeanie exclaiming, with a groan—

"O Esmé! how could you? It is never safe with her to use words that can be turned two ways. She is absolutely certain to catch hold of the wrong one."

"Another variety," murmured the young lady with a self-satisfied accent, and something that was intended for a self-satisfied "smirk," she explained.

Esmé actually laughed, and at that moment another variety in the morning's diversions occurred, that might have been very well anticipated, but nevertheless came upon them all with something of a momentary surprise.

Within the half-opened doorway stood a gentleman, who was, for the first instant, taken for a stranger by the whole party. His surprise at the laugh he had heard was evidently as great as the girls' surprise at his appearance. After a slight pause, of somewhat embarrassed silence on both sides, the newcomer advanced a step into the room, saying however, apologetically, as he did so—

"May I come in, although I both see and hear that my late patient no longer needs me?"

"Oh, the doctor!" said Flora Campbell quickly, and going towards him as she spoke. "Please forgive our bad memories," she said gently, but with much emotion in her voice. "You were so good to us yesterday, but we were so taken up that we scarcely—scarcely"—

"Had time or eyesight to spare to see what I looked like," was the answer, with a grave smile. "No, no, my dear young lady, I know that well enough. But I cannot tell you how thankful I am to find you all so little needing my attention to-day. You are the best and bravest young ladies it has ever been my good fortune to come across. Earnest and grave enough when the trial still lay heavy upon you, bright and courageous now that the cloud is lifted. I shall have to hold you up to my patients for the future, as examples."

A slight flush came into Flora's cheeks. Cheerfulness was the one virtue that she so often forgot to cherish, that indeed she so often forgot was a quality at all to be regarded as a virtue. The good doctor's words of undeserved praise came upon her now as something of a revelation. Had she reflected upon the state of affairs with them all at the present time, before he spoke, she would have given it as her opinion that an attitude of grave contemplation was most befitting their recent experiences. But here was this good and highly esteemed man commending a spirit of cheerfulness !

A few hours later Mr. Robertson returned to his own domain, from the island of Bute. He had kept a greater watch and ward over his sub-tenants than they supposed, and although he had taken occasion to make several short excursions during the past few days, his movements had, in reality, been a great deal more dependent upon those of Esmé and her friends than they would have felt comfortable in knowing.

Mr. Robertson's first interview with them had greatly interested and amused him; the second one, when they were "lost" at the foot of Goatfell, increased his interest, and confirmed him in his intention to leave them, as long as they chose to remain, in the free enjoyment of the combined safety and comfort they were so sure to find with

Mrs. Menzies when once they had secured her friendship.

Having learnt that they were now about to leave Arran, he was returning, and the news he heard the first thing in the morning after the accident did not lead him to alter his mind. But he also was as greatly surprised and as greatly pleased as the doctor had been when, on presenting himself at the "shanty" door a little after two o'clock in the afternoon, he saw a circle of bright-faced girls listening to some history from the lips of one of them, which was certainly not a "doleful ditty," if its hearers were to be credited with any sympathy.

The doctor's fuller scrutiny of the four half-drowned maidens had resulted in a promise to send them all up a draught, which he should like them to take that night, a hearty recommendation to keep themselves cheerful, and a kind but very peremptory order to Miss Terry to go to bed at once.

"And so, you see," she said smiling, after he had taken his departure, "it is good-night after all. Come along, Esmé. I am so tired, that if some one does not do lady's-maid for me, I think it probable that I may be following the example of some English dame's son John, who went to bed with one of his shoes on."

"Then that would be another idiosyncrasy," said Jeanie.

"No, ma'am," was the reply, with a ready tongue if a sleepy head. "It would be a plagiarism unworthy of a daughter of the free and enlightened republic. Miss Campbell, allow me to ask what you are about to do?"

"To come and put you to bed. Do let me help you."

"Can't!" with a solemn shake of the head. "Very sorry, *désolé* to say 'no' to any petitioner, but I have given the high office to Miss Esmé Wilson, and she would not give it up. Would you, Esmé?"

"No indeed, nor share it either. So come along."

"All right—one moment."

The one moment was spent by Alice in gently pushing Flora back into a chair, while she whispered to her, "Keep Jeanie from thinking of yesterday any more now, if you possibly can; keep her cheerful. I know the doctor thinks we should. And, Flora dear," in a still lower whisper, "the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we rejoice."

Then, with a parting kiss, she ran off to join the "lady's-maid" she had so cleverly chosen, with no view to her own comfort most decidedly, except the comfort of knowing that she had hit upon the wisest arrangement for all her friends.

"You are so clever at getting out tangles. I wish you would get that horrid skein of silk of mine unravelled for me now, please, Esmé," was Alice Terry's last request before she fell into a deep, untroubled sleep.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS ALICE TERRY'S TALES.

ONCE upon a time, when four young ladies found that they were intruding into a "douce man's" private apartments, with the "douce man" himself in possession of them, they expressed their embarrassment by four variously emphasised "Oh's!" Some days later, when the "douce man," in his turn, was discovered intruding his eyes into the young ladies' sitting-room, he was similarly greeted.

"You certainly do take me for that Gorgon's head," said Mr. Robertson with a smiling bow, as he stood there just without the open door, looking in upon them all.

As they almost always sat with that door wide open upon the yard, it would not have been easy for a visitor to pretend ignorance of the inmates' presence until due announcement. Mr. Robertson had made some attempt, indeed, to get himself properly introduced as a caller. He had gone over to his landlady's side of the premises, in the first instance, to ask her to inquire for him if the

young ladies could receive him. But Mrs. Menzies was out. No one of the family was at home but stolid, honest-hearted Jamie, and he sturdily and stoutly refused to be the bearer of any messages whatever, to his mother's lodgers in the shanty.

"I canna gang for ye, and I winna gang," he muttered doggedly. "They'd be thinkin I were keen after their cake."

And so determined was the lad to avoid the appearance of a growing hankering after the refused dainty, that Mr. Robertson gave up his attempts to move him, and did his own errand, thereby interrupting the thread of Alice Terry's narrative, and winning for his first greeting those four startled "Oh's!"

It was little wonder that Miss Alice's cheeks were dyed rather a richer crimson than usual, when Mr. Robertson accepted Flora's invitation to enter, and said at the same time—

"And what became of Lazy in the end, Miss Terry?"

Three hours' sleep and her early dinner had so refreshed the girl that she had laughingly offered to treat her companions to a fairy tale, she had written out for her pupils' benefit a couple of days ago. It had just begun when Mr. Robertson came across the yard; and this was the beginning of it—

"'When *I'm* a big dog I am sure I won't,' said a little puppy to a brother puppy."

"'You won't do what?' asked a big dog that was standing near them.

"'Why, I won't do as you do, run about after the sheep all day. I will play and enjoy myself. What is the good of working, I should like to know? It only makes you tired.'

"'When you are older, Lazy, I hope you will talk better sense,' said the big dog. And then it scampered off to save a stupid little lamb from tumbling itself off the top of the cliff on to the stones below.

"And old Crunch wagged his tail and barked for joy when the shepherd called out, 'Good dog! good old Crunch!'"

Just at that point a shadow fell across the light streaming in at the doorway, and Lazy's history came to a full stop. Neither Mr. Robertson nor the intended audience could learn anything more of his fate than that he grew very fearfully fat, and was very nearly coming to a bad end. But in spite of the interrupted story, and in spite of some very gravely tender words spoken by the visitor before he took his leave, the whole party felt greatly cheered and comforted by his visit. They had been down into the valley of the shadow of death, but they had felt the Father very near them. They were able in their hearts to say, "Thy rod and Thy staff they comforted me."

"Still, Esmé dear," said Flora, a few minutes after Mr. Robertson had said good-bye,—“Still,

wonderfully as you have recovered from the accident, and brave as you are, I do think it will be better to take his kind advice, and get you away from here as soon as possible. Every time you see the bay it will remind you of your peril."

"Rather," said Esmé, softly, "it will remind me of the wonderful great blessing God has given me, in helping me once in my life, at least, to remember that this life and one's own ease are not everything. We may stay here, may we not, till we see whether my father and mother come to look for us in answer to your letter?"

Before Flora could answer Alice sprang up, exclaiming, "Why, that reminds me. We have never been to look for letters to-day, and I feel quite sure that there must at least be one awaiting me from my dear Mam. I will run off to the post and see."

"And I will come with you," said Jeanie readily.

"And I don't see why any of us should stay in-doors all day long, because we met with an accident yesterday," sensibly remarked Esmé.

And accordingly they all put on their hats and went for a quiet saunter, the two young artists, who had made many inquiries after them, showing very considerable satisfaction at having ocular demonstration of their welfare. As the elder shook hands with Alice, he said with a quiet smile—

"I hope you will put me a little step higher in

your esteem from to-day. I have just had my first swimming lesson."

The American girl greeted the information with a frank, bright glance. "Please forgive my harsh words," she said earnestly; "I have been very sorry for them since."

And then the girls passed on to the post-office, and Cyril Seymour troubled his brain with wondering whether his sketch of "Golden Hair" would be improved by the colouring of the cheeks being toned down to to-day's pale tint, or if he should leave them of the bright, beautiful pink they wore when he painted them while the girls sat eating their picnic dinner, that delicious afternoon in Glen Rosa.

Meantime the office was reached, and, having waited till it was opened for the second delivery, our tourists were rewarded by abundant spoils. A letter and a newspaper for Alice a new German novel for Flora and a very affectionate letter from Lady Graham, letters from schoolfellows for Jeanie, and for Esmé a regular bundle of papers, the *Illustrated*, the *Graphic*, and a couple of *Punches*. Above all, there was the long letter written by Mr. Wilson to his darling young daughter on the eve of setting out for the yachting excursion.

Esmé laid it down that evening after a fourth or fifth perusal with a sigh of relief. Alice looked up from *Punch* quickly.

"Esmé, my dear, considering that your sigh came at the end of reading your parent's letter, it does not sound dutiful."

Esmé's seriousness gave way a moment to a flitting smile as she answered, "My sigh was most filial then, I can assure you. I was congratulating myself on the almost certainty there is now, that my parents will read our account of the accident before they see any that may have got into the papers. For wherever they touch for news, they are sure to have their letters forwarded, and I know papa would read my letter before he waited to open a newspaper."

"Vanity to be sold, a bargain," laughed Jeanie. "Apply"—

"For that and a bundle of impudence in good condition, over the way," said Flora, with a smiling nod across at her sister, who certainly looked not one whit the worse for her yesterday's share in the misadventure. Not particularly disconcerted by her elder sister's amendment to her speech, she now turned her attention to Alice.

"Alice, you have had quite as much *Punch* as is good for you. In a paper shape it is liable to prove almost as intoxicating to the brain, if indulged in beyond the bounds of moderation, as when mixed in a china bowl and adorned with slices of lemon."

"Which is a shape in which you have never seen it, I expect."

"Haven't I, though? Do you suppose I have never read a Christmas story in my life? And pray, what are mind's eyes given to us for, if not to see the things we read about—or, by the bye, hear about; for that reminds me I can see your fat little Lazy you were telling about this afternoon, and I want to hear the rest of him."

"Or else," corrected Esmé rather eagerly, "read us what you were writing just after tea. I know that was something more serious; I could tell by your face. What was it?"

"Something too serious for any of you now," said Alice quickly. "Something I began writing in the night, and I thought, as you were all writing just now, I might as well finish it."

"Just so," said Esmé again. "And so, please, you may as well read it to us now, for we are all of us more in a humour for something quiet toned and earnest, than for merry things. Solemn and sad music, if we had a piano; as we have not, a sad story. It won't hurt us, Alice dear, really, just for a little while to be quiet. Besides, your stories have always a good ending."

"Read away," said Jeanie, folding her arms, and leaning back in her chair with an air of calm assurance that she would be obeyed in the end.

"Please do, Alice dear," put in Flora Campbell. "I expect that if you don't we shall all be imagin-

ing for ourselves histories twenty-fold more dismal and terrible than yours is likely to be."

Miss Terry opened her writing-case with some appearance of yielding. "My poor little tale is not exactly dismal or terrible; I did not say that. But it is serious; and what seriousness and sadness there is in it is all connected with the sea."

"Never mind," said Esmé. "Your reading about the sea cannot make us think about it more than we are doing already. And I sometimes believe it makes things seem simpler, and less heavy on one's mind to talk of them. I would rather talk of the sea to-night, than go to bed with the feeling on me that we all had a dread of mentioning it."

"And so would I—much!" agreed Jeanie emphatically.

Thus urged, Alice finally drew forth her sheets of manuscript, made a little *moue* almost worthy of Esmé, and began with an air of resignation—

"I hope that you all mean to imagine yourselves the youngest class of small girls at school again, for my story is only a fairy tale, and I call it 'Mayvin's Tears.'"

"Better call it 'Esmé's Fears,'" put in Jeanie, "and let it have reference to cows."

"Better get Flora to send you to bed," retorted Alice, and then, to prevent the chance of being answered, she forthwith plunged into the reading:—

"Little Mayvin the foundling was the only bright speck in all the dreary, horrible village of Daura. The dirty, tumbledown cottages were the homes of men and women as wicked as they were idle, and the whole place swarmed with untaught, squalid, cruel children. The gardens were dust-heaps, and the fields dismal, empty deserts, beyond which moaned the ever-restless, hungry sea, as it rolled over the terrible rocks hidden so treacherously beneath its surface.

But the people of Daura were glad of those awful rocks.

When the storms gathered up, and the winds blew in towards Daura, then the eyes of those men and women were wont to shine, and the sounds of hard laughter mingled with the roar of the storm as the people rubbed their hands, saying one to another—

"Ah! we are well planted here. We are those who keep good-luck in our cupboards. No need for us to work, who have the wind and the sea for our servants. They work for us!"

And they would gather their lamps, and light them, and set them in the windows, and along the hills, and watch the beautiful ships with the white sails fly towards the brightness. And then these men of Daura, and the cruel women, would watch with the laughter on their faces, saying one to the other—

"Ah! the moths! the great-winged, foolish moths! See how fast they fly to burn their wings in the flame of our candle!"

And the grand ships struck upon those hidden rocks. The betrayed, unhappy ones who had thought to have found a fair harbour and a merciful refuge from the storm, found nothing but a night-black sin. And with that final finding in this world they were sucked beneath that deceitful sea; they were swallowed up to their sleep beneath the hungry waves that ever moaned—"Hush, hush!—more, more!"

And all the men of Daura, and the women, would rub their hands again, and put out their lamps, and go to bed quickly that they might rise betimes in the morning to gather the rich booty of the wreck.

But the child Mayvin would kneel on the beach with clasped hands and straining eyes, out in the wild darkness of the storm and the night, watching if perchance her prayers might be answered, that the waves should yield up, if it were but one of the many lives they had seized upon.

Who was little Mayvin? Ah! that no one in the village knew. Some said that the fairies had brought her to Daura, that the place, for her sake, might be saved from the destruction which it deserved. Others thought that the sea had cast her there two years ago when the great ship from the

far East went down upon that dreadful coast; and some declared that she was a fairy child herself. But whoever she was, and wherever she came from, the fact was plain to every one that, in spite of sorrow and neglect, her eyes were bluer, her cheeks fresher and fairer, and her steps more light and free than those of any other child in the place.

And, somehow or other, when a long season of fine weather had made provisions scarce in the idle village, there always proved to be something good to eat in the small, one-roomed hut where the lonely little creature made her home. Fair Mayvin was but a child of some ten years or so, it seemed, and yet her small, steady power of labour had made her little garden look like a blooming paradise. Many of the men of Daura, who were too lazy to sow, to dig, to plant for themselves, would have fain gathered her beautiful strawberries or pears, or plucked the clustering roses. But, whenever any approached that garden to steal, some mishap befell them. One would stumble in climbing the fence, and be pierced in the side with the dagger in his own girdle; another would tear his hand with the iron spikes on the gate; strange dogs had bitten others. To all some calamity had come. And the child, seeing them suffer, would come out of her cottage, and wash their wounds and bind them up, and give the fruit they could not steal. But even so she could not win the people's love,

nor persuade them to listen to her entreaties to cease from their sinful ways.

When the stormy nights came, little Mayvin the foundling would kneel out upon the sands all through the dark, fierce hours, with her white hands clasped, praying for the winds to cease and the doomed ships to sail away.

And those men of Daura would have gladly snatched her up and flung her, with her clasped hands and her praying lips, into the foaming waves. But there was an unseen, protecting power around her—the power of innocence and loneliness, perchance—that they could not dare; and they could only, with their gnashing teeth and their raging words, proclaim their wrath against her. Then the tears would flow faster from the child's blue eyes, and Mayvin's hands were clasped yet tighter as she murmured sadly—

“Ah! poor people, they are even worse off than those pitiful ones yonder, struggling so helplessly in the waters.”

And then, fearless in the midst of foes, she would return to her watching, her weeping, and prayers.

One day as little Mayvin wandered, alone and very sorrowful, for a low wind was beginning to murmur its ominous threats, along the seashore, she came to a little cave hitherto unseen. She entered. It was dark and quiet, and with a floor

of soft white sand. The next stormy night the child Mayvin crept away to the little cave to kneel and pray through the awful hours, out of sight and hearing of the fiercely watching, cruelly rejoicing wreckers. And as the lights shone out from the windows of the village, and the noble, stately ship came on to meet its swift destruction on the rocks, tears streamed from the child Mayvin's eyes; and then—a strange and wonderful thing—the whole cave glowed and gleamed and glittered in a glorious rainbow light.

The fairies of the crystal walls gathered up the tears, and flashed their brightness through the storm. The ship was saved. The crew saw the glorious illumined cavern, and turning their vessel's head from the meagre village shore, soon rode at anchor in a peaceful bay beyond the grinding rocks, and looked once more for the glory, but it was gone. The ship was safe, and Mayvin's tears had ceased to flow. Daylight was peeping forth, and the tired fairies were asleep.

Those of the village who had seen the light, and brilliancy, came to search the cavern, and they found nothing but an empty cave, dark and silent and still, with a floor of soft white sand. And they returned to their homes gnashing their teeth with rage that the goodly ship had escaped their snares.

Once more the winds blew, and the waves tossed and foamed over the rugged rocks, and the wreckers

lighted their lamps, and Mayvin crept to the cave to pray and weep. And the fairies of the crystal cavern walls caught her tears once more, and flashed their radiancy over the waters as they danced. Once again a ship, rushing on destruction, was turned to learn the meaning of the mystery, and rode safely at anchor in the bay.

And thus it happened throughout the storms of an entire year, and those villagers of Daura began to be in want. And some would come in the gloaming, and look longingly over the little Mayvin's garden palings at the good cabbages and flourishing potatoes, and the child pitied their pinched cheeks and hungry eyes, and filled their arms with wholesome food. And by degrees, one after another, in a shy, shamefaced way, began, as evening drew on, to step into their own gardens and to dig a little bit, and to push in a few seeds. And whenever and wherever this happened, there was sure to be the child Mayvin passing, and she would step in quietly and help without a word in the work. And wherever she went there the fairies followed, working in the night while the wreckers took to sleeping, and the long-neglected gardens began to thrive and flourish.

And the wondering villagers of Daura went on with their fair, new work. They ploughed their fields, they scattered their grain, they gathered together sheep and goats upon the hills, and the children's hearts grew tender as they fed their fowls,

and watched the chicks and the yellow ducklings. And they sprinkled down crumbs for the dark-winged, soaring birds, whose songs of sweetness they for the first time heard mingling with the seagull's screech.

Time passed on, and the terrible village of Daura was dreary and horrible no more. Even the very storms upon its shore seemed to be less frequent, and a wreck there was seldom known. One day those men and women and the little children met together before the cottage of little Mayvin the foundling. They came with a thank-offering in their hands, of money saved from the produce of their gardens and the smiling fields. And they asked her to build a lighthouse with it, to warn vessels from their rock-bound coast. And her blue eyes grew deep with joy, and her fair face lovelier to look upon than the sweetest day in May.

The lighthouse rose rapidly. The workmen built in the daytime and the fairies built at night, and the time came that the work was done.

"To-morrow morning," said the villagers of Daura, "we will fetch a lamp from the town, and place it aloft, and our Mayvin's hand shall light it;" and the village slept.

At midnight a sweet and marvellous melody floated over Daura, and the villagers awoke and rose. And behold a great light streamed from the lighthouse, making a white pathway over the sea

far as the sight could reach. And some mounted to the lighthouse tower, and they found a crystal vessel filled to the brim with glittering diamonds, more brilliant than a myriad fireflies, or than the great "gram" light itself. And above, in shining letters, was written—

"MAYVIN'S TEARS."

"Nought that is precious can be lost."

And they ran to seek for Mayvin. But the child Mayvin was gone. Her example had done its perfect work, and she was gathered home once more, or to seek those others who had yet to learn that it is more joyous to do good than evil.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

LAST DAYS IN ARRAN.

A SILENCE of some minutes followed the ending of Alice Terry's fairy tale. She was a good reader, and however small the merits of her little story might be, she herself had sufficient partiality for it just in the hour of its completion to give it the fullest advantage, or justice, as might be the judgment of critics, of earnestness and pathos of accent. Besides, her auditors were in the mood for something with a touch of sentiment in it, and were always predisposed to regard her efforts in composition with favour.

Somewhat unfortunately, perhaps, for the gratification of Alice's vanity, she was so preoccupied with inward meditation over her own creation that she did not see the admiration expressed on the faces of her three companions. She was aroused from her reflections at last by one of them.

"You are always a puzzle to me, Alice," exclaimed Jeanie, suddenly breaking in upon the

lengthy silence. "Always a puzzle—a bigger one every day."

"Umph!" ejaculated Alice, with a little doubtful turn of her head. "I wonder if that is meant for a compliment? I hope, at least, that you liken me to a Chinese one, carved out of ivory."

"If you had said 'carved out of a kaleidoscope,' I might have said 'yes,'" answered Jeanie. "You are the queerest mixture. If you told stories at all"——

"Which I don't. I'm 'Truthful James.'"

"Well then, tales, if you like that word better. But your mention of 'Truthful James' is the very thing. If you made them up at all, I should have imagined they would be certainly after the pattern of Artemus Ward or Mark Twain, or"——

"Or Ingoldsby Legends," filled in Esmé, as Jeanie paused to think of another humorous writer.

"A hoarse sort of caw
Gave that little jackdaw,"

murmured Alice solemnly. "My dear friends, I fear you forget that the writers you name are distinguished, like myself, for their pathetic histories. My tales are after their pattern, with the additional beauty of occasional obscurity enveloping them, like that purple mist the other side of Goatfell."

"Was it to the inspiration of that mist that we

owe this present story of the Daura wreckers?" asked Flora.

Alice looked thoughtful again for a moment. "No," she replied; then slowly, "I have been a little doubtful on that point myself. But the main idea of it, I believe, came into my head that day as we stood watching the foam-crested waters dashing up around Ailsa Craig. I imagined storm-tossed sailors catching sight of its grey head, suddenly illumined by the lightning's flash, and straining every nerve to gain it; then the bitter despair when its hopeless rockiness came full in view; and then, as that flood of sunlight streamed forth across the waters from it to our quiet little harbour of refuge, like a finger pointing to safety, I thought—I thought many things," she ended hastily, and broke off abruptly.

Flora, in a low tone, took up the theme—

"And so you thought that it is even thus across life's storm-tossed sea, and past the frowning rocks, that the Sun of Righteousness shines out upon us, bringing us unto the haven where we would be."

The silence was broken by a tap at the door, and the immediate appearance thereafter, of touzle-headed Jamie's face in at the narrow slit of an opening he allowed himself.

"That's right, Jamie," said Jeanie. "Nothing like caution, you know. If you opened that door any wider, we might pounce on you, perhaps."

Jamie grinned. "It's her we want," with a nod at Alice. "Mither's got that Sandy Johnston to tea to pleasure ye, an' fresh-baked scones, and she says will ye no be comin to see 'im? An' it's he is to tak' your boxes to the steamer, he says, for naething, when ye'll gang."

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN CONCLUSION.

ON the morrow they would have all departed, but at the present hour those four travelled companions looked very much at home in that London room, and very much like staying at home, too. Circumstances, aided by their own efforts and determination, had given them that final afternoon and evening together, to be spent in tranquil peace.

All the packing was finished, and not only was Elinor away on a visit, but Mr. and Mrs. Wilson had also purposely set off directly after luncheon on a round of calls, which was to wind up with driving on to join the early family dinner-party of a distant relative. Whether the distant relative would have been so favoured under any other state of affairs is rather doubtful, but as it was, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson had hailed the informal invitation as the thing of all others the most desirable. It gave such a capital reason, without too much fussiness in the matter, for leaving the party of friends to the enjoyment of some hours of quiet, uninterrupted

intercourse. Esmé was most grateful to her parents for this fresh, unobtrusive mark of their loving thought for her.

"There is a good fire in your old schoolroom, Esmé dear," said her mother on rising from the luncheon table. "Of course there is the drawing-room for you all, as usual, if you like; but I thought that you might perhaps be able to make yourselves more comfortable in the smaller room. At any rate, now it has been put in order, you can have your choice."

And the whole four running upstairs forthwith "to inspect the premises," as Alice said, the unanimous choice fell upon the old schoolroom, not only because of the cheering aspect given to it by the bright, little, early fire in the grate, with its smiling threat of coming autumn, but for a general air of homeliness which is miserably conspicuous by its absence from drawing-rooms.

I have never but once in my life seen a drawing-room that did not look to me on a par, for downright homelike comfort, with one of the long galleries of the British Museum. There are long, broad benches down the middle of the galleries, you remember, here and there. So you can sit down when you please, just as you can in a drawing-room, and you can look about you, and see a number of pretty or wonderful things—as you can in a drawing-room—but you must not touch, and you

"mustn't touch" in a drawing-room. And the galleries are nicely warmed; so are drawing-rooms generally. In the galleries you know that you are not at home, and in the drawing-rooms you very much feel not at home. If ever I have a drawing-room of my own, I shall try if I cannot do something really kind for the poor old, put-upon drawing-room race. In the first place (if I am not too much afraid of being called "queer" or "affected") I shall change its ridiculously inappropriate name.

The word "drawing-room" is a contraction of the word "withdrawing-room." Everybody knows that. And what can the title "Withdrawing-room" signify, but the cosiest, quietest, calmest, innermost heart-sanctuary of the home? Everybody knows that is what it does signify. But everybody also knows that the title, and the race it belongs to, have not one least, tiniest atom of right to belong to each other. The title signifies the one exact, actual thing that a drawing-room of the present day is not. And so the poor old drawing-room family, for generation upon generation, is made to tell one long drawn-out, silly big story. And so, when I have my drawing-room, my inner sanctuary of friendly freedom, brightness, warmth, and comfort, the beautifully significant name the race has so long desecrated shall have to be given up—not because in this instance inappropriate, but because so long misused—and my drawing-room

shall be called the "Home Room." Entrance into that room will ever signify a place in its owner's heart, a place by name in its owner's prayers. A gathering-room for those who are mutually aiding each other on the road of truth and virtue, courage, industry, and charity. Withdrawn for a few brief hours from the outer strife and turmoil, the outer dismal sin and sorrow, only to go forth, strengthened by the joyous though earnest communion of restful friendship, to fight more bravely, more trustfully, with fresh powers of endurance, the battles of the Lord.

There shall be no touch-me-not things in that room, never fear, nor a lot of little gimcracks either, nor a single crackable chair or spindle-legged table. A heap of comfortable chairs; the very best and sweetest-toned piano I can possibly buy; as many pictures, Italian-taken photographs, and good engravings, in the pell-mell muddle that I like, crammed on to the walls, as far as within-eyesight space is available; and wherever there is a safe, untroublesome corner, modern Venetian glass—Venetian glass because I love it—modern, because if it gets broken, well, modern things can always be replaced with modern, where there is money to do it. And if money lacks, well, before I had it I hadn't it, and now I haven't it again, that is all, and the world is none the poorer either. Of course books. That goes without saying. You might as

well expect to have a comfortable room without books as a comfortable dinner without salt. Not show-books, you understand — “drawing-room books!”—but books for reading, splendidly bound in common bindings, if you know what I mean by that. Books that will open easily, and that will lie open where you wish, while you chatter about them, and not lie with an ugly gape when you shut them after.

But there now ; enough, and more than enough, of that problematical drawing-room. The Wilsons’ drawing-room was not a bit like it—not a bit like the kind-hearted people themselves. It was like “a drawing-room,” so called, an imitation miniature museum, with all the disadvantages and few of the advantages of one. The old schoolroom, on the contrary, was eminently cosy and comfortable, although its only specimens of bric-à-brac were an odd-shaped little Chelsea china inkstand, and a couple of parian china vases, given to Esmé on her ninth birthday by an admiring and affectionate nursery governess.

Five-o’clock tea-things on the table, cake, biscuits, and butter. On four footstools four grown-up young ladies round about the fire ; not that they were cold—anything but that. They were all a trifle too warm, in fact, but that salamander Alice Terry. But they sat on footstools, with their teacups on the floor beside them, and got slightly roasted, for the same

all-sufficient reason that they had done a good many things during the past six weeks—to feel the full, strong, perfect conviction that they were having holidays. They liked work ; two of the number, indeed, would unhesitatingly have chosen all-work rather than all-play, had the alternative been one or the other. Happily they were not called upon to make a choice. They could have both in season, and they enjoyed both. They were apparently bent on enjoying something else also just now, for Alice and Jeanie were toasting crumpets.

It was Alice's idea to do the cooking of those crumpets upstairs, instead of having them brought up ready for eating.

"A little domestic employment, you know, Esmé, will help me to fancy myself back again in the shanty, or taking a lesson in porridge-making from good old Ailsa Menzies across the yard."

"I don't fancy Mrs. Menzies is very venerable by reason of her age as yet," said Flora Campbell, smiling.

"Then by reason of her wisdom, perhaps, in the matter of cloutings, as experienced by Jamie and Jock," suggested Jeanie.

"Just so," assented Alice ; "and her wisdom in attaining to an exalted opinion of us, and her wisdom as displayed in many other ways. But thinking of wisdom reminds me of a dream I had last night."

"Anything like the one you had, the night after our accident at Arran?" asked Jeanie again.

"Not a bit," was the decided answer. "That, Miss Jean Campbell, was all the wit of Sydney Smith; this latter one was, as I have implied, all his wisdom. Flora!"

And Miss Terry twisted herself round on her knees from the fire, with the crumpet shivering in the air on the end of the toasting-fork. Miss Campbell looked from the toaster to the crumpet and back again, in considerable doubt as to what was expected of her.

"Do you want me to butter that half-cooked crumpet, Alice, I wonder?"

Alice waved the delicacy in the air scornfully. "Half-cooked, indeed! Much scone-eaters know about cockney crumpets! But I guess, ma'am, it's not yourself I'll trouble to butter it, whole-cooked or half-cooked. I prefer to trust that business to Esmé. I like butter."

"Was your dream, then, about the butter I did not pass you for your dry toast yesterday?" was the laughing query.

Miss Terry shook her head gravely. "It well might have been. But to be serious for five minutes, Miss Campbell, if so frivolous a creature as you are can be. Do you happen to remember what Mr. Wilson was speaking of last night after dinner?"

"Do you mean about the school-board manage-

ment," asked Flora, thoughtfully, "and the queer questions that the examiners sometimes ask the children?"

"Just so. Well, last night I was up for examination before a school examiner, and after keeping me quaking and trembling before him for an awful time in silence, he suddenly growled out this question, 'And pray, girl, can you tell me what good your outrageously long and self-indulgent holiday has done you?' And then, as if he were playing a sort of gobble-you-up-quick game of Earth, Air, Fire and Water, he took out his handkerchief and threw it at me, shouting fiercely, with a most undignified, rapid gabble, 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten?' But I answered before he got to the ten, so he had to give me the prize. He threw that at me too in such a passion. Said I was the meanest Yankee out, and it was all the dinner he'd had for a month."

"And what was the prize?" asked Jeanie, laughing.

"A bun off a railway restaurant counter. I gave it to Jamie Menzies, and he broke a tooth in it. But then he had boasted it was sharper than a crocodile's, so I was not so much to blame in the matter."

"Alice, how can you talk such nonsense?" remonstrated Flora, also laughing.

Alice lowered the crumpet and regarded it reflectively.

"Dreams generally are nonsense to those who do not suffer from their tortures," she remarked sedately. "Nonsense indeed! Say rather horrors. That examiner and that examiner's fierceness—his anguished despair at the loss of his dinner—Jamie's anguished resignation at the loss of his tooth! Ah! words fail to express the agony."

"And meantime," asked Flora, "who is to be condemned to hazard another crocodile tooth on that clung crumpet?"

"Not you, evidently," was the quick answer, "for I don't believe any examiner would pass the word 'clung' used in your sense of tough. It may be colloquial; I doubt if it's classical. What should you say, Jeanie?"

In spite of the laughing mode in which the question was put, Jeanie blushed. She was not very clear in her mind as to what the word colloquial meant, and she was very glad when Alice, with unobtrusive tact, turned attention from her to Trusty, the four-footed centre of the circle. Whatever other folks might have learnt during the "outrageously long" holiday, Jeanie Campbell had secretly learnt to have a very usefully humble opinion of her own attainments. She had an immense admiration for Alice Terry, and the seven weeks of constant companionship had given her abundant opportunity for increasing that admiration, and for discovering that it might be founded

upon very solid grounds. Alice was barely two years older than herself, but through all the effervescing sparkle and surface vivacity, Jeanie had discovered that her friend was abundantly more than two years, aye, more than four years older than herself in firm self-reliance, in thoughtfulness, and in the attainments due to a painstaking industry.

Jeanie had never thought of trying to reach up to her sister. Perhaps Flora's gravity had given the bright young girl some instinctive notion that greater firmness of purpose, greater steadiness of application, would have to bear in their train a loss of her joy in laughter, a deadening of the springs of youthful happiness. Intercourse with the American girl had banished this fear, and aroused a noble emulation in her friend to reach up to her. Decidedly Jeanie Campbell had gained great wealth of good from her long holiday. Meantime she was misty as to the exact meaning of colloquial, and proportionately glad that Alice's next question was addressed to Trusty, before she had been expected to give any answer to the last.

"Trusty," began Alice, coaxingly, "Trusty, you dear old lover of comfort, allow me to present you with a crumpet."

Trusty was lying face to the fire, nose between its paws. There was the appearance of just that tinge of anxiety in its meditations that gave added zest to its enjoyment of the wonderful, new, and

unexpected glow. If any one wants a perfect study of exquisite contentment, let him devote five minutes to the unobtrusive contemplation of a dog lying on a fur rug before the first fire of the season. The historical boy with his bread and bacon-fat, and gate to swing on, are nothing to that dog, although the deep gaze of questioning ecstasy in the dog's unfathomable eyes betrays the expectation that its present bliss must be doomed to a speedy termination.

That questioning look strengthened in Trusty's eyes, as it slowly and solemnly turned its beautiful head over its shoulder, in mute answer to Alice's address. If anything was going to happen to put a period to its happiness, the happiness should at any rate be enjoyed up to the last possible moment. It was hard enough to feel courteously obliged to turn its black-tipped nose away from the lovely warmth, not even that fine quality of high-bred dog politeness could do more just then. Alice laughed.

"You lazy old doggie! Is that how you accept handsome offers of the earliest delicacies of the season?"

"He is in too much enjoyment of one to care for another," said Flora, passing her hand softly over the smooth head.

"Besides," added Esmé, with a little pat of her white fingers on Trusty's white coat, "Doddles is

a member of the temperance society. He only eats twice a day."

"Oh—h—h—h!" murmured Jeanie.

"Well," pouted Esmé, "of course, unless it happens to be anything very particularly nice. He certainly won't break his rule for a half-toasted, dried-up, cold crumpet."

Meantime Trusty wisely returned his nose to his paws, and left the vindication of his character to his mistress. And since he evidently would not relieve Alice of the crumpet, she finally finished its toasting, handed it to Esmé to be buttered, and magnanimously ate it herself.

"And it is almost as good as egg sandwiches, too," she declared, "if it does not quite come up to the fish ones."

"Fish sandwiches," said Jeanie. "Why, how grand and elegant that sounds. Folks would never imagine that it signifies herrings and thick bread-and-butter."

Alice put down her tea-cup and folded her hands. "One of the uses of travel, my dear young friend, is to discover the obscuring merit of euphonious language. When you wish to allude to cows in a heathery swamp, you speak of the noble denizens of the flowery plain. When you desire to remark that you got wet through in a drizzling rain, you inform your hearers that you were enveloped in a purple cloud; your listeners go away with an

indistinct impression that something rather warm and comfortable, on the whole, had fallen to your lot, for which you ought to be envied. But what of that? You have acquired an art, and you ought to practise it."

"By way of proving the good you have got out of your travels?" asked Flora. "And that reminds me, Alice, what was the dream-answer that you gave your dream-examiner?"

"I know what mine would have been," murmured Esmé, as she sat with her elbow resting on her friend's knee, and her round chin dropped into the palm of her hand. Her blue eyes were gazing with as deep an intentness into the fire as Trusty's black ones. During the past ten minutes she had been thinking of Alice Terry's dream, and the question she had dreamt of.

Flora bent down to her, answering gently, "Yes, dear, I fear yours would have been that you had learnt a painful lesson, never again to trust yourself as one of a company of young women on a tour where danger is very possible, and aid very doubtful."

The earnest blue eyes were turned from the fire, and raised to her friend's face for a moment, with a quick-flashing, reproachful smile. "Ah! Flora," came the low, tremulous answer, "you know that is not so. If it were all to come over again, the being lost, the getting so tired, the being"—— and the voice

sank lower still, "the being nearly drowned, I would choose it all again. The happiness and good have far outweighed the troubles."

"And that is what you would have told the examiner?" asked Jeanie, with a gravity that proved that to her, for the minute, that visionary examiner had become a real personage. But Esmé Wilson did not smile, for her own impressions were very similar. She spoke in the same half-shy murmur, somewhat usual with her when much moved, as she answered—

"No, Jeanie, it is not exactly that I should have told him. I don't think his question would have meant anything to do with pleasure or comfort, you see, but something deeper, something of lasting nature to oneself, and that is what I do think I have got during these seven weeks, if I can only keep it."

Esmé's soft round chin sank down into the little white hand again, and the red lips folded together as though they meant to say no more. Flora put her arm more closely around her. Alice, from the opposite end of the small circle, with hers interlaced around her knees, bent forward—

"Esmé," she said gravely, quietly, "you speak often of learning from others. Will you not for once let others learn from you? Will you not tell us what it is, this good possession, that our seven weeks' tourist holiday has given you?"

Esmé Wilson lifted her chin from her hand, but it was only to lean it against Flora as she answered, "Ah! Alice, I have no lesson to teach you. It is you and Flora who have taught me that it is not in single, sudden deeds of unselfishness, but in the daily life of self-forgetfulness that the truth is shown whether we have taken up our cross to follow Him. We have had seven weeks' holiday, but I have learnt more from your silent teachings than I ever learnt before, and please God I will never forget it."

THE END.

